

REVIEWED
FINAL FANTASY XII
Square takes the RPG series to a new level

INTERVIEW
RICHARD GARRIOTT
Exclusive chat with the father of MMOs

EXCLUSIVE
Wii
Is Nintendo taking the piss?

PREVIEWED
TEST DRIVE UNLIMITED
Atari takes racing in a bold new direction

REVOLUTION
PlayStation3: Sony's folly or finest hour?

HIGHLIGHTS
ALONE IN THE DARK: NEAR DEATH INVESTIGATION [MULTI] BATTLEFIELD 2142 [MULTI] BRAIN TRAINING [DS] CELL FACTOR [PC] CRYSIS [PC] DESTROY ALL HUMANS! 2 [MULTI] GOD OF WAR 2 [PS2] LOST PLANET [360] RUMBLE ROSES XX [360] SYPHON FILTER [PSP]


eMag

My editorial is historically the last page of the magazine to be written, as it's a digression of the most unforgettable experiences during the course of the issue. You'll quickly ascertain that I'm not a fan of chest-pounding commentaries from editor's shouting about the exclusives in the magazine, the interviews they've secured or the material inside – I have a cover and contents page for that. No, I prefer to offer some insight into my thoughts and/or the magazine, and perhaps how the issue has taken shape; a foreword to the product that you're about to read through. But while I was originally going to talk about the yearly torturous trek to LA for this year's E3, a golden shower of gaming goodness poured into the **games™** office shortly before the issue went to press, and if you haven't deduced it already, it's the comical disclosure of Nintendo's new console name. No longer the stylishly titled Revolution (which we all like) – say hello to the Wii. No, seriously, it really is called Wii. When we first heard the news we thought it was a prank, and after confirmation only laughter and bad wee jokes could be heard. The funniest thing, though, was trawling through the completed issue and changing 'Revolution' to 'Wii', only to guffaw at the number of hilarious sentences it subsequently created. How Wii laughed…

Paul Morgan

Paul Morgan
Editor




PLAYER
44
x2


TIME

CONTENTS

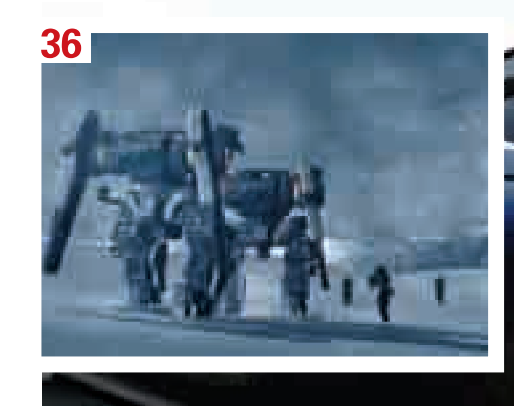
FEATURES

REGULARS

PREVIEWS

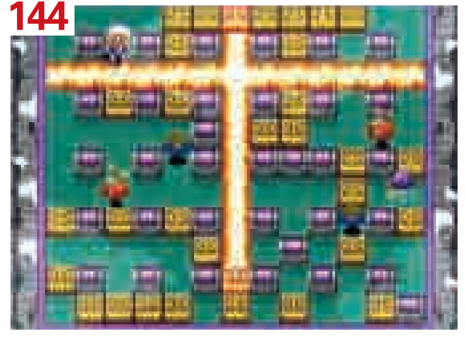
REVIEWS

RETRO

36




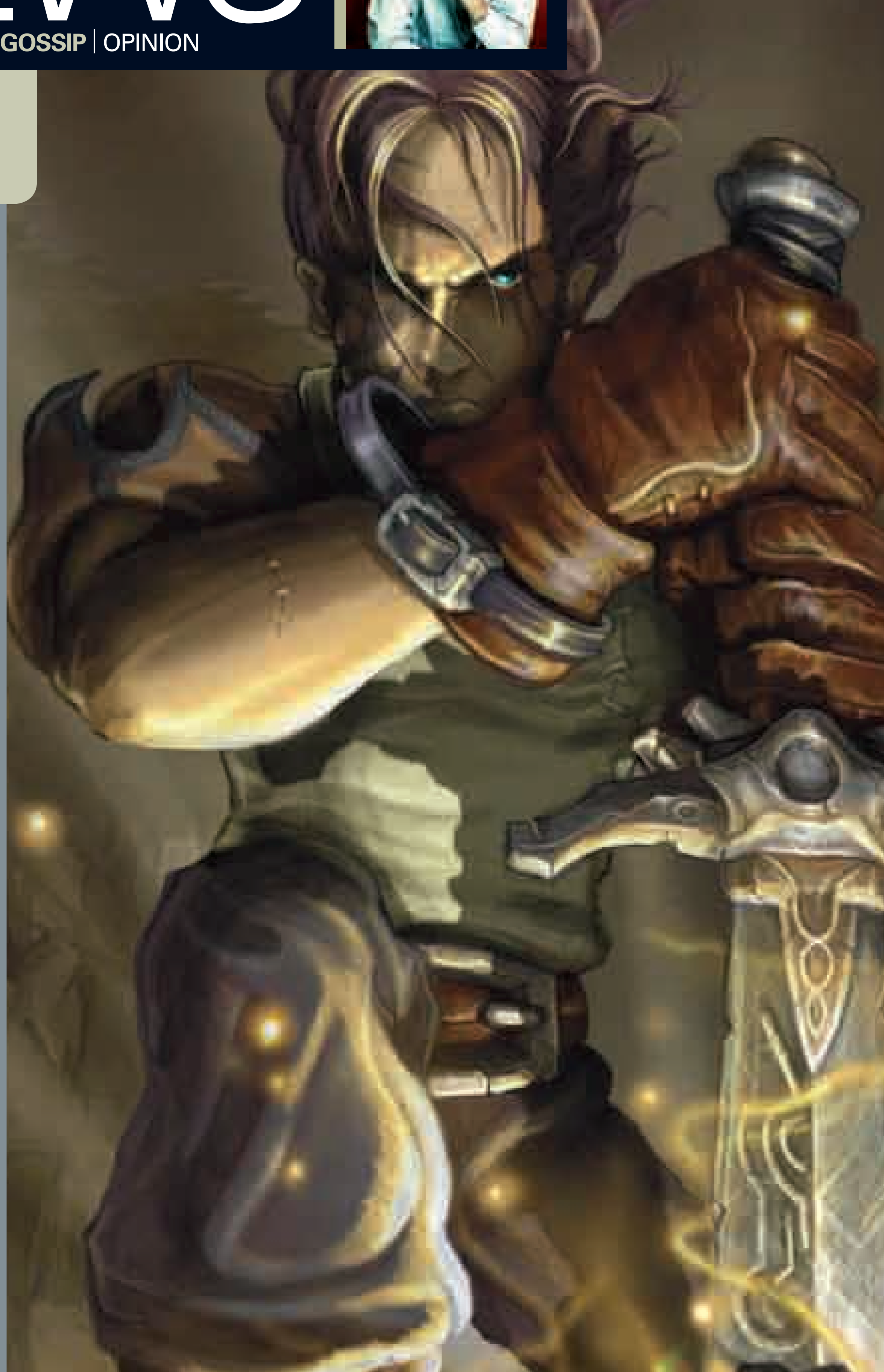
108


144



games™ takes a ride in
Atari's racing sensation
32
Test Drive
Unlimited

NEWS

NEWS | INDUSTRY GOSSIP | OPINION



CONTENTS

FIND OUT WHERE TO GET THE ESSENTIAL STORIES WITH OUR QUICK GUIDE TO THE NEWS

GOD SAVE THE SCENE

UK DEVELOPMENT BOLSTERED WITH TWO HIGH-PROFILE STUDIO ACQUISITIONS

This month, two significant British developers were snapped up by eager publishers, displaying a very encouraging show of faith in the newly reborn UK industry from the respective publishers. Microsoft Game Studios welcomed Lionhead Studios to its growing fold of second-party development studios, and Sega has acquired *Championship/Football Manager* creator Sports Interactive as part of a wider expansion effort within North America and Europe. The deals strengthen both firms' commitment to the UK development scene – Sega also acquired Creative Assembly last year and has been working closely with Sports Interactive since its split with Eidos. Microsoft has continually supported UK development studios, shelling out extravagant amounts of cash for former second-party Nintendo developer Rare during 2002.

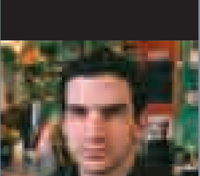
Although Microsoft's Lionhead acquisition is undoubtedly the more high profile of the two, it's thought that Sega's purchase could turn out to be the more sensible of the two. Where Sports Interactive was bought during a very successful period for the firm, Lionhead has recently been struggling to perform sales-wise, suffering unexpectedly poor sales for both *Black & White 2* and *The Movies* (to the extent that Activision actually cancelled the console versions of the latter title).

Headed by veteran game designer Peter Molyneux, the high-profile developer recently reduced its staff by a third in an effort to cut costs – something that had nothing to do with the proposed Microsoft acquisition. It is not yet clear whether or not Microsoft will attempt to build the studio back up, or what direction the developer will be taking, but Microsoft platform and marketing director, Richard Teversham, spoke very positively of the studio and of Molyneux in a recent interview with GamesIndustry.biz. "We're honoured to have the vision, the gaming expertise, and the team that's at Lionhead joining us in Microsoft Game Studios," he says. "Britain has some top talent, and our philosophy, our strategy, is to work with the best." Molyneux accents his enthusiasm – he himself has often shared a stage with J Allard and co at various development conferences, and Lionhead has always focused on developing games for the PC and Xbox, so the deal is mutually advantageous. "We could not be more excited about being part of MGS," he says. "They have long supported our creative vision." It is rumoured, though, that Microsoft may have been able to conduct the deal on extremely advantageous terms due to Lionhead's financial troubles.

Both Sega and Microsoft are valuable investors in the British development scene, and it's undoubtedly positive that such studios as Lionhead and Sports Interactive will be supported by the vast resources that are available to a major publisher. However, many may find it disquieting that the UK's best independent developers are being enfolded in the arms of waiting publisher giants at such a rate. Every company involved, though, is delighted with its developments – and in today's industry, getting behind a publisher is often the only way to ensure survival.

WHAT THEY HAVE TO SAY

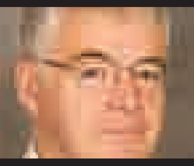
THE BUYERS ON THEIR NEW PURCHASES AND THE SELLERS ON THEIR STUDIOS' NEW HOME



Miles Jacobsen's smiling face. Lovely chap.

MILES JACOBSEN

Sports Interactive's MD has been in the limelight before, namely during the developer's split with Eidos and consequent forced abandonment of the *Championship Manager* name. With Sega, though, he believes things will be considerably less fraught. "Sega felt like home from the first meeting we had with them," he explains. "They really understand development and developers." And what of the benefit of Sega's resources to the studio's titles? "The acquisition can only help, really," laughs Jacobsen. "Extra staff if and when we need, lots of new technology available to us, with the current team staying in place. But that's all long term – at the moment we are just concentrating on making the games we are working on… SI will continue to grow organically, just as we always have."



Richard Teversham, looking rather stern.

RICHARD TEVERSHAM

EMEA Xbox platform and marketing boss Richard Teversham is delighted to be working with Lionhead, but is reluctant to divulge future plans. "Let's wait until E3 to talk about those sorts of things," he says when asked about plans for next-gen MS development. On the talent at Lionhead, though, he is more effusive. "Peter is someone who is extremely eloquent, who's got a great vision," he says, "and we'll be utilising those skills and vision, I'm sure, in a lot of things that we do." This is only the latest step in Microsoft's expansion: "We are proud to have Lionhead joining us alongside such great developers as Rare and Bungie – I think the cross-fertilisation of their expertise into our other developers is going to go down really, really well."



Sega America and Europe boss Naoya Tsurumi doesn't like having his picture taken, apparently.

NAOYA TSURUMI

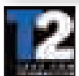
Sports Interactive is a bit of a departure for Sega in terms of investments, but the people involved seem to hold high hopes for the studio's intellectual properties and talent. As Sega Europe president Naoya Tsurumi says: "We acquired Sports Interactive because Sega has the utmost respect for the Collyers [founders], Miles Jacobsen and the team for what they have achieved. The company is made up of highly talented individuals who have and continue to produce award-winning titles." This is, of course, part of a wider strategy for the company, as he explains: "The acquisition illustrates that we are achieving our objectives, and have our strategic planning up and running… we feel that this is yet another huge step towards strengthening our standing within the European market."

Thanks to GamesIndustry.biz for the quotes from Richard Teversham and Miles Jacobsen.

DATA STREAM

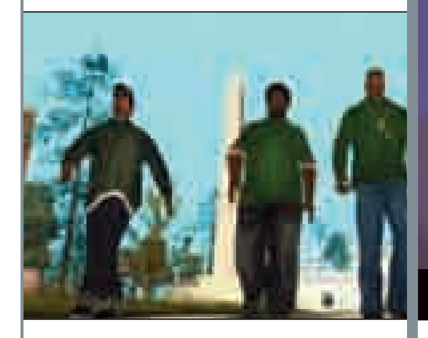
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SEE YOU IN COURT

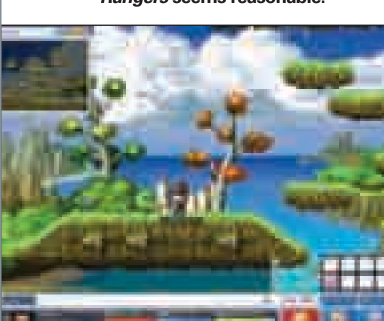
It's official. The case against TakeTwo, Sony and US retailers filed by the families of police officers murdered by 18-year-old *GTA* addict Devin Moore will go to court. The infamous Jack Thompson originally presented the case, but since his disbarring it has been handled by the state of Alabama. The trial is expected to commence later this year. Moore was sentenced to death in 2003, and this follow-up lawsuit is expected to attract a lot of media attention.

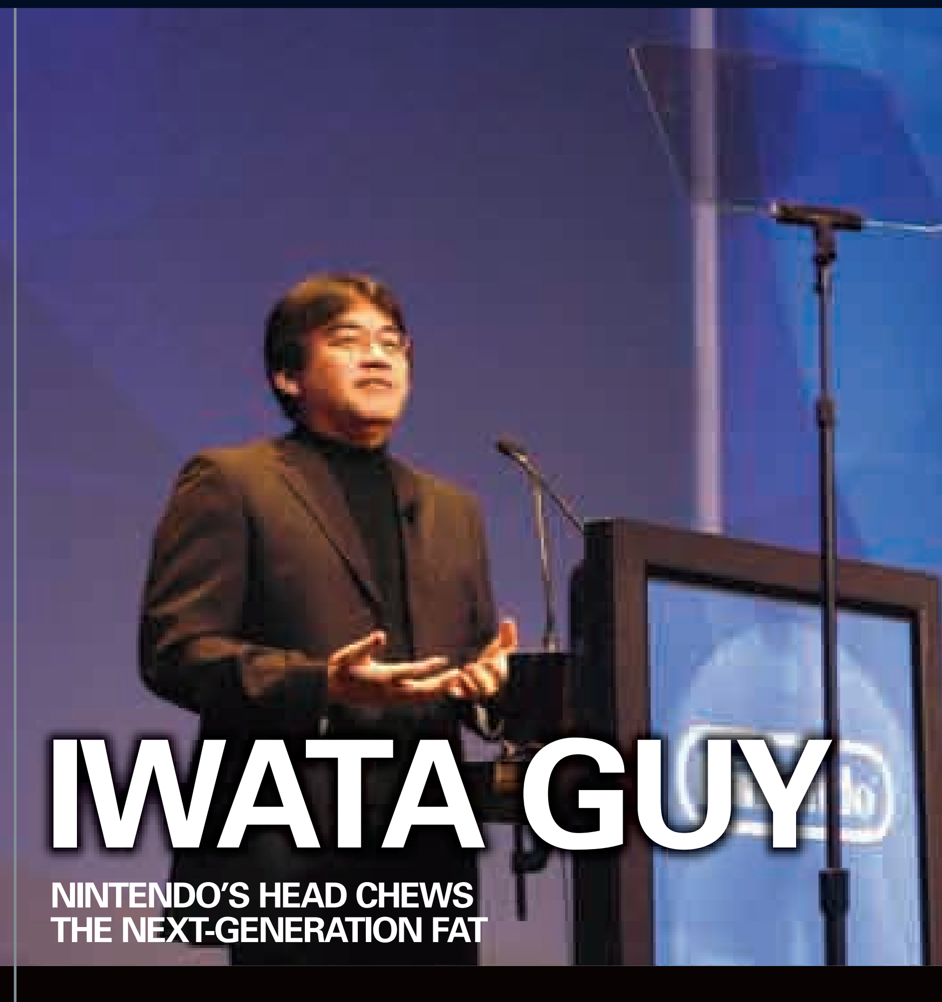




PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

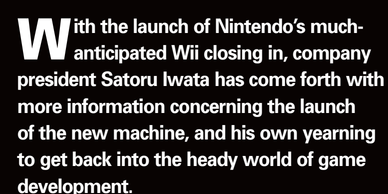
Korea's latest playground fad is *Maple Story* – if your character is underpowered, you're nobody in the average Korean playground. So how are kids coping with juggling school and level grinding? They're making their parents do it. A Korean article revealed that parents are spending, on average, three to four hours a day building up their kids' characters. Suddenly, pestering our mums to record *Power Rangers* seems reasonable.





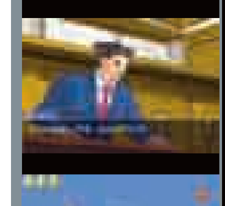
IWATA GUY

NINTENDO'S HEAD CHEWS THE NEXT-GENERATION FAT



Kirby is sucking up the news with delight.





With the launch of Nintendo's much-anticipated Wii closing in, company president Satoru Iwata has come forth with more information concerning the launch of the new machine, and his own yearning to get back into the heady world of game development.

First of all, Iwata expects Wii software to go against the current industry grain, and retail at a much lower price point than the current batch of next-generation games. Speaking to CNN, Iwata commented that he, "Cannot imagine any first-party title could be priced for more than $50". That's good news for those who feel stung by the £45-50 of the vast majority of Xbox 360 games, although it's unlikely that the correct exchange rate will be maintained. Still, if Nintendo Wii games end up selling for around £30-35 each, a trip to the local Game store will prove to be a far more pleasurable experience.

Less pleasing for the UK market, however, is the news that there will





not be a simultaneous worldwide launch. Unfortunately, it would seem Nintendo's stance on Europe is not likely to change any time soon, and we could be waiting for the new console while our Eastern cousins are happily waving their hands in front of their TVs. Speaking at the GDC, Iwata said: "We don't think it's necessary to do the simultaneous worldwide launch simply because others are doing this". Hopefully, the suggestion that the Nintendo Wii will launch before the end of the year still applies to us in the UK.

And finally, it would seem that the Nintendo chief has been reminiscing about days long since past, as he told MTV: "I have gained a little bit of interest in getting more involved in game development again", but went on to explain that his business role is too time consuming to even consider it. In the Eighties, Iwata worked on such seminal titles as *Earthbound* and *Balloon Fight*, and is almost entirely responsible for the globule of pink happiness we have come to know as Kirby. So, shall we expect the pink one to turn up in a Wii title soon? You heard it here first…

DS EXPRESS

Nintendo's supremely successful handheld has continued its dominance of the Japanese market, with news filtering through that some 4 million units have now been sold in its native country. Couple this with the fact that four out of the top five selling games of 2005 were DS titles, and it'll come as no surprise that there's now a shortage in Japan. Iwata has commented that he is hopeful that, "We can get rid of this terrible, terrible shortage". So that he can make even more money.



NOT ANOTHER…

GIZMONDO EXEC CAR STORY

AND THE FIASCO GOES ON…

Just one short month after losing his stunning Enzo Ferrari in a spectacular car crash, former Gizmondo exec Stefan Eriksson has lost another of his beloved vehicles. Yes, unlucky for poor Mr Erikkson, he's had to say goodbye to his luxurious Mercedes-Benz SLR McLaren.

According to the *LA Times*, a Beverly Hills police officer became suspicious upon spying the car's European licence plate while Eriksson's wife Nicole Persson was taking the car for a drive. After pulling Persson over, the officer discovered that she was unable to produce a valid driving licence, and a brief investigation revealed that the car was not registered in the US. After contacting Scotland Yard, it became clear the car was stolen.

2006 is not shaping up to be a great year for Erikkson. After the fiasco that was the Gizmondo, and then that smash in California, Erikkson is now left with only one of his three super cars, a heap of debt and a considerable headache. According to LA County Sheriff Sergeant Phil Brooks, "[Eriksson] brought through San Diego two Ferraris and the Mercedes, and said that they were show cars and he was not going to drive them in the streets". Turns out he was lying, which should come as no surprise to anyone, although, technically, Eriksson has not been caught driving the vehicles (the mysterious 'Dietrich' is said to have crashed the Enzo).

games™ fully expects Eriksson to pop up in another police report very soon.



Here's what it looks like when it hasn't been smashed up with a hammer.

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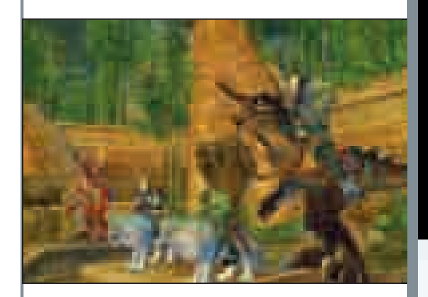
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PUNISHMENT COMES

Blizzard has just unleashed its harshest wave of disciplinary action yet on the *World Of Warcraft*, banning 5,400 players and suspending over 10,000. This follows the release of the latest patch for the game, which makes life more difficult for hackers looking to take advantage of the game's bugs. Players are encouraged to report hackers to Blizzard. In response, a group of illegal gold miners in the game have launched a Stop Snitchin' campaign in an effort to protect themselves. Quite mad.





VIRTUAL SUPERSTAR

We miss free busking on the underground. Watching tramps with one-stringed guitars being chased by the transport police was a marvellous sport. Now everything's organised it's not fun. To celebrate the launch of *Guitar Hero*, though, one of the music squares was reserved for the world's first virtual busking session. Equipped with a TV and the game, Luke Albigés – **games**™'s old games editor – delighted pedestrians in order to promote the game. That sounds like the best job ever…





Wii will change the world

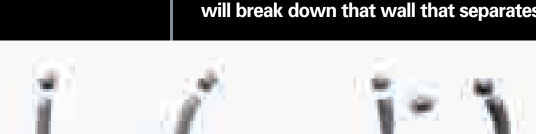
NINTENDO COMES STRAIGHT OUT OF LEFTFIELD WITH REVOLUTION'S NEW NAME

■ Wii will rock you!

April 27, 2006. The day of Wii. Quite possibly the exact moment Nintendo threw the towel into the next-generation ring. We (ii) couldn't believe it. We're sure you can't believe it. But, alas, it's true. The Revolution has become… the Nintendo Wii.

Anyone hankering for an explanation of this bizarre choice of name need look no further than Nintendo's official website (revolution.nintendo.com). Accompanying a brief animated video clip is a mission statement from the Japanese videogames giant. Let us take a look at it in detail.

"Introducing…Wii. As in 'we'. While the codename 'Revolution' expressed our direction, Wii represents the answer. Wii will break down that wall that separates videogame players from everybody else." Now, we're trying to remain as positive and lacking in cynicism as is humanly possible… but the Nintendo Wee? Surely not.



■ We promise we'll stop saying 'Wii' and making up silly 'Wii' jokes. Maybe.

The statement continues, "Wii will put more people in touch with their games…and each other. But you're probably asking: What does the name mean?", we were, as it happens. "Wii sounds like 'we', which emphasises this console for everyone…Wii has a distinctive 'ii' spelling that symbolises both the unique controllers and the image of people gathering to play."

It's clear what Nintendo is trying to do, and without the obvious homonym, it's a clever and unique name. But the double entendre isn't going anywhere. "Because, it's really not about you or me. It's about Wii." That says it all, really.

Rob Saunders, PR manager for Nintendo UK, states that, "An unusual name sets us apart from the crowd, just as our distinctive machine is completely different from what our competitors are offering. The names of our competitors indicate a beefed-up version of what they already offer. The name Wii demonstrates that the system is something totally new to the world of gaming".

As ridiculous as the name is, it still doesn't change the fact that Nintendo is genuinely trying something new and innovative, shifting the videogaming paradigm and trying to bring non gamers and gamers together. We can't help but think, though, that the daft moniker will only marginalise the console further, and quite possibly make it the laughing stock of the mainstream market. Wii shall see…



A NEW HERO

CHRIS DEERING JOINS REDOCTANE

Former SCEE CEO Chris Deering has joined RedOctane, the publisher of *Guitar Hero*, as a non-executive director. Deering has quite the track record in the videogames industry, having paved the way for PlayStations 1 and 2 in Europe throughout the Nineties and early Noughties. In 2004, he was also named president of Sony Europe before retiring from the company at the back end of 2005.

"We're assembling a phenomenal board for a phenomenal company," enthused RedOctane CEO Kelly Sumner. "RedOctane is one of the most dynamic, innovative and energetic companies in the games business, and Chris' appointment continues our progression towards global impact."

"The industry knows that Chris has a special passion for music, which will prove invaluable as we continue our rapid growth in musical instrument-based products," Sumner continued, while Deering added, "RedOctane has talented technical visionaries who have already proven in North America with *Guitar Hero* that they can fashion everyday music lovers into great musicians. I look forward to helping RedOctane advance this very promising frontier of interactive high-tech entertainment".

With *Guitar Hero 2* officially announced for a November release, the future is looking extremely bright for RedOctane. Just let us play along to some Pumpkins, and everything will be all right with the world.



The man himself – expect to see Chris Deering wielding an SG Controller in the near future.

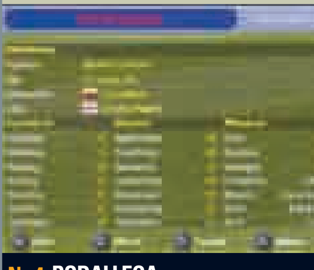
games™ THE TOP FIVE

FOOTBALL MANAGER 2006 TARGETS



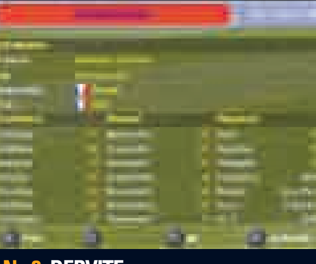
No.5 GENRO

Young. Brazilian. Good.



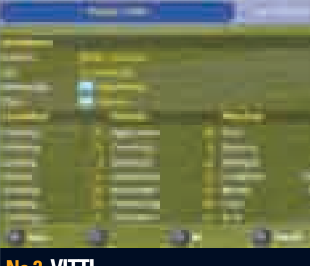
No.4 RODALLEGA

Young. Colombian. Better.



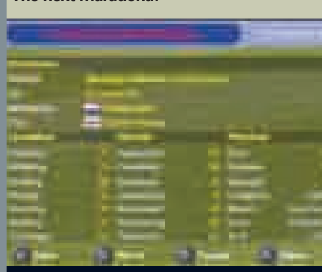
No.3 DERVITE

Another awesome French defender.



No.2 VITTI

The next Maradona?



No.1 RODRIGUEZ

Almost TOO good.

GAMES ROOM 101

THE NEGATIVE SIDE OF VIDEOGAMING



NO. 44: INTERNET TYPOS

Given the media-based nature of our work and our pastime, we, like many of you, spend a lot of time on the Internet. It's a limitless resource for everything videogame related, and a very wonderful thing. Inevitably, with all this web surfing, forum scouring and trailer-downloading going on, we're going to make the odd typing error in the address bar at the top of the browser. It's just a sad fact of life.

This didn't really matter a few years ago, back then we'd be taken to an error page and be free to continue. Nowadays, it only takes one hotmai.com, gamesspot.com or googel.co.uk, and you'll find yourself in the company of one of the world's true evils: the affiliate link web page. You know the ones – they have nothing on them but links for other websites or loan companies.

It's not the sites themselves that cause us pain. They're fairly harmless in fact – nobody is forcing us to click on the links, and they can be removed with a simple push of 'back'. No, it's the bastards behind them. Conniving scum-bags profiteering on the incompetence of the human race, all for the sake of a percentage of a penny each time. It may seem like nothing, but there are so many cack-handed fools out there, that it soon adds up. If only we'd thought of it first…



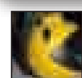
A big dog laughing at our stupid cack-handedness.

The same person is responsible for loads of these sites. Clever bastard.

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I AM 8-BIT

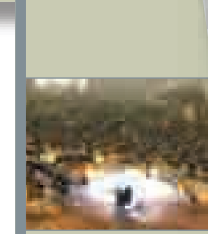
Los Angeles was the venue for the opening of 2006's I Am 8-Bit exhibition, an art show inspired by 8-bit games. From the bizarre to the incredibly clever, the range of games and artists on display was astonishing, and Harmonix even made a special version of *Guitar Hero* to be played by visitors at the opening. The exhibition will run for a month and copies of the *I Am 8-Bit* book, which comprises a collection of last year's and this year's work, is available either at the show or from the website, www.iam8bit.net.





XBOX LIVE-ACTION

Paramount Pictures and Microsoft have teamed up to offer a movie-themed download service over Xbox Live. So far, HD trailers, Xbox 360 dashboard themes and other customisation content have been announced for the service which will debut with Paramount's release of a trailer for the forthcoming *Mission Impossible 3*. Mind you, we're not entirely sure why people would want to use the 360 for all their movie-trailer needs when they could probably download the movie itself from any PC not long afterwards…



Microsoft hopes Mizuguchi's *Ninety-Nine Nights* will help spur the 360 on in Japan



EASTERN PROMISE

MICROSOFT PLEDGES ITS DEDICATION TO JAPAN

Takahashi Sensui, Microsoft Japan's Xbox division manager, has stated that 2006 will be "the stepping stone" to the 360's eventual success in the east. Speaking at a Microsoft press conference in Tokyo, Sensui emphatically confirmed the company's confidence in the 360's capabilities, and its potential for excellence in Japan.

"Since the launch of the original Xbox in 2002, there was one thing that we have consistently said," explained Sensui, "Microsoft will inevitably succeed in Japan." He went on to say that, "The Xbox 360 is not just the only next-generation console available in the market, but it will also continue to be the best console for years to come". Bold claims indeed, but there's no disputing the facts: the 360 is the only next-gen machine available anywhere, and there's no reason why the Japanese shouldn't take to the 360 as we have done in the west.



"WITHOUT THIS TERRITORY, THERE'S NO WAY GATES CAN TOPPLE SONY"

Microsoft's console has underperformed in Japan; it was the only territory that failed to sell out at launch. However, Sensui has stressed that the 360 and its Live service is growing rapidly in the east, with 95 per cent of consumers having accessed the Live Marketplace (available without subscription). There have also been a total of 520,000 content downloads; an impressive figure, but when compared to the global figure of 10 million, it only serves to highlight the 360's position as a niche product.

There's no disputing Microsoft's commitment, though, as Sensui affirmed: "Microsoft believes that it isn't a true success unless we succeed in the Japanese gaming market. As everyone may know, the Xbox 360 has taken the European and American markets by storm. As the chief of Japan's Xbox division, it will be my duty to realise the same kind of success here in Japan."

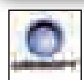
Microsoft's triumph in the east is crucial to its strategy for the Xbox 360 – without this significant territory, there's no way Gates and co can topple Sony. We shall wait and see whether or not this resolute dedication to Japan pays off.


eMag

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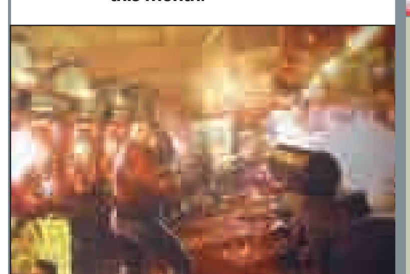
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START OF THE REVOLUTION

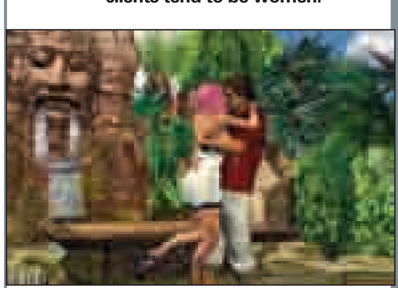
Ubisoft has confirmed its first Wii title: *Red Steel*. Set in modern-day Japan, players take on Yakuza gangster types, using swords and guns via the Wii's controller. This is possibly the first time that the first confirmed game for a Nintendo console hasn't been first party, and bodes well for the future – with Ubisoft keen to leap aboard the Wii bandwagon, others are sure to follow. The screen below is from *Game Informer* magazine which broke the news earlier this month.





SPEND THE YEAR

Erotic title *Spend The Night* from Republik Games, which sparked considerable interest due to its, ah, 'controversial' subject matter, has been suspended indefinitely after the developer failed to find a publisher. It was intended to be an online sex simulation where players go on virtual dates and engage in various virtual erotic activities. We're not talking *Leisure Suit Larry* here – Republik envisioned it as a serious endeavour, like an online version of a dating agency. Except that at least some of a dating agency's clients tend to be women.





Bish! Bash! Bosh! PSOne is no more, at least you can still play old games on the backwards compatible PS3.

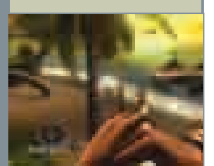
LAST STOP ON THE LINE

THE END OF THE ROAD FOR SONY'S PSONE

After more than a decade, Sony has decided to put an end to the original PlayStation's illustrious career. The 32-bit machine, which is almost entirely responsible for videogaming's shift into the mainstream, was released in Japan in December 1994 with the US and European version arriving during the following summer. Incredibly, according to a recent announcement from Sony, the machine has sold 103 million units globally.

For those who still hanker after the PSOne's glory years, Sony has confirmed that the PS3, like the PS2 before it, will provide full backwards compatibility for PlayStation games, so anyone with a *Bishi Bashi* addiction needn't worry. The Japanese firm has also announced an emulator that will allow PSOne titles to be played on the sleek PSP. With the PSP emulation and homebrew scene still very active, it makes sense for Sony to produce a fully licensed, legal way to play emulated software on its console.

No specifications have yet been revealed – let alone details on how the emulation will function – but we imagine it will work in a very similar way to current homebrew systems via a program, and ROMs stored on a memory stick. *Metal Gear Solid* in our hands? Yes please.



THE CRYING GAME

FAR CRY IP SECURED BY UBISOFT

Publishing giant Ubisoft has announced that it has purchased the full rights to the *Far Cry* intellectual property initially created by German studio Crytek. The developer is now busy at work on the phenomenal looking *Crysis* for PC. The move for the IP that produced console exclusives *Instincts* and *Predator* as well as the original *Far Cry*, means that Ubisoft is now allowed to continue developing titles based on the property, with complete independence from Crytek.

The deal means that Ubisoft is free to utilise the version of the CryEngine technology implemented within *Far Cry*, meaning that Ubisoft will continue to grow as one of the world's premiere developer/ publishers. However, Crytek's latest title, the aforementioned *Crysis*, is separate from the deal and will be published by Electronic Arts.

We are looking forward to seeing where Ubisoft takes the CryEngine, certainly the statement that the firm plans to take it to "the next level" bodes well for both publisher and consumer.

There will be many more *Far Cry* moments like this in Ubisoft's future.

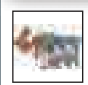

eMag

DATA STREAM



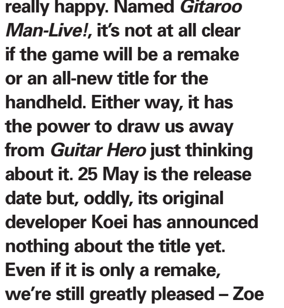
DOWNLOAD COMPLETE

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



GET UP, GITAROO

Gitaroo-Man has appeared on a Japanese Sony release list for the PSP and we're really, really happy. Named *Gitaroo Man-Live!*, it's not at all clear if the game will be a remake or an all-new title for the handheld. Either way, it has the power to draw us away from *Guitar Hero* just thinking about it. 25 May is the release date but, oddly, its original developer Koei has announced nothing about the title yet. Even if it is only a remake, we're still greatly pleased – Zoe and his evil minions will never be punished enough.

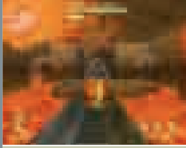




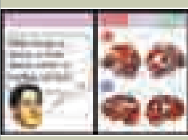


PET PLAY

Now this is mental. A Singapore research project is developing a virtual reality unit that lets you play chase with hamsters. Bear with us. *Mice Arena* places rodents in a virtual reality where it can chase you around a maze, vaguely like in *3D Monster Maze* except only slightly less terrifying. The hamster follows a piece of bait around a tank and its movements are mapped into a virtual world where you, the player, are that bait. We don't quite know why you'd want to face off against little Fluffkins, but there will be a fully functioning prototype in November.



Hopefully *Metroid Prime: Hunters* will strengthen the DS's presence in the West – and *Twilight Princess* isn't even out yet…



Damn! Our brains are old and squishy. *Brain Training* STILL has Japan under its spell



Creative Assembly and Sports Interactive represent Sega's UK front

NINTENDO FORECASTS RECORD PROFITS

GOOD TIMES AHEAD

Soon the facts will be laid bare in the cold, clear statistics of the 2005 financial reports due to be published at the beginning of June. Nintendo has jumped the gun somewhat and predicted its highest profits in five years. The DS's immense Japanese success over the past year (confirmed by a recent report by Famitsu, which showed DS sales of 4.32 million in the region throughout 2005, more than double what the PSP sold at 2.07 million) presumably bumped up the estimate, which will be confirmed or proved over-ambitious on 25 May, a mere week from now.

Nintendo shares rose following the predictions which foretell an 8.7 per cent profit increase. Statistics aside, though, the upshot of it all is that Nintendo is reasserting itself in the market after a few rather shaky years; the Japanese giant has never exactly been in danger of collapse, but with such extra revenue behind it Nintendo can now afford to pursue a much more aggressive strategy with the forthcoming Nintendo Wii in the home console market. We do love to see a little competition.

SEGA SPLASHES OUT

PUBLISHER AIMS TO STRENGTHEN ITS WESTERN PRESENCE

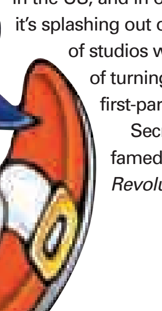


America's Army: Rise Of A Soldier, one of Secret Level's previous projects

Sega is generally renowned for its Japanese-developed titles, but it has been known to outsource development to the UK and US – take Sumo Digital, who developed the latest *OutRun* titles, as a case in point.

Now, however, the publisher is reputedly aiming to establish a development studio of its own in the US, and in order to do so it's splashing out on a couple of studios with the aim of turning them into a first-party Sega unit. Secret Level, famed for *Karaoke Revolution* and *America's Army*, is the latest developer to be snapped up. It had already been assigned to "recreate" a Sega franchise on next-generation platforms in partnership with Sega itself last July, but is now wholly owned by the firm.

This follows the news that Sega has also acquired Sports Interactive and of course it also bought Creative Assembly last year. It seems Sega is serious about making itself more international as a developer as well as a publisher. Nintendo could learn a lot from this eagerness to impress the Western market.




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TIME FOR A CHANGE

GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE 2006 SAW 12,000 GAME DESIGNERS, PROGRAMMERS, ARTISTS AND MUSICIANS CONVENE IN SAN JOSE TO TALK ABOUT THE LATEST TECHNOLOGIES. BUT, AS GAMES™ DISCOVERED, THE EVENT'S UNOFFICIAL AGENDA WAS HOW THE INDUSTRY WILL DRAMATICALLY CHANGE OVER THE NEXT FEW YEARS

It seems hugely fitting that a conference that was started as the informal gathering of some 30 developers in someone's living room would, 20 years later, find itself confronting how to reach out to the living rooms of players. And stay there.

Let's first paint you a picture: taking place in San Jose, GDC is the kind of place where you'll see Japanese businessmen from the big, famous companies such as Namco and Sega wandering around among junior testers who only got into game development a few months previously. You could end up in a lecture, sitting next to *The Sims* designer Will Wright (as **games**™ has in the past) or see David Jaffe and Keita Takahashi (creators of *God Of War* and *Katamari Damacy* respectively) hurry past you, late for an appointment. It's a real meeting of minds, with hours of lectures, panel discussions and unveilings gluing together a social network of developers.

As is often the case with social networks, in 2006 a buzz swept across it. Talk regularly returned to two issues: Sony and Nintendo's push for disc-less digital distribution, and the overall theme of changing the industry – breaking its back to create a new world of games.

Although almost every GDC sees the likes of Microsoft, Sony or Nintendo step up to explain a slight new direction, none of the previous years were as aggressive as 2006's. And for good reason; this year, among the game development sector, there's a feeling that everything is coming to a head as there's an odd dichotomy in the industry, squashing it into a new form – acceleration and permeation. In preparation for next-gen formats, more and more people are needed to make detailed games, but the growth of games has meant lots of different people play games in different ways – there are more developers focused on making 'casual' games than there are those dedicated to making something for a format such as the Nintendo DS, for instance. Struggling to accept this, then, and twisting the industry into a more manageable state to do so was the unofficial agenda of GDC. The event slogan may be 'What's Next?' but really it should be 'What Are We Going To Do Next?'.





"IF **TETRIS** WERE PRESENTED TODAY, HERE'S WHAT THE **PRODUCER** WOULD BE TOLD: 'MORE LEVELS, BETTER **GRAPHICS** AND **CINEMATICS**, AND YOU'LL NEED A MOVIE LICENCE TO SELL THAT IDEA'"

SATORU IWATA, PRESIDENT OF NINTENDO, COMPLAINING ABOUT THE STATE OF THE GAMES INDUSTRY

Sony's answer is digital distribution. While the company demo-ed traditional console games for PS3 – *Heavenly Sword, Ratchet & Clank, WarHawk* – the real focus was on the change Sony expects to bring to games via the PS3's Network Platform. Worldwide studio president Phil Harrison painted a picture of videogaming's future that saw developer-made content streamed direct to PSP and PS3 over the web. Episodic games, online games, MMOs, downloadable arcade games, full games downloaded without a disc – all are possible with the new network service. A prototype for *SingStar Online* that lets users download tracks iTunes-style was premiered, as was a version of *F1* where you bought access to tracks and cars. "We have an incredibly bright opportunity and future," said Harrison.

The issue of what developers should do with those opportunities was explored somewhat in the 'Game Developers Rant' session. At GDC 2005, this event caused a stir – four noted development names took to the stage and dressed down the industry with an indiscriminate appetite, blasting everything and anything that got in their way.

They preached to a full house – the event was packed beyond capacity to fire-safety-contravening-levels. Returning for 2006, it didn't live up to the heady heights of the previous year (in fact, the panel seemed to be arguing itself into a corner of pretentiousness by the end of it), but it is clear that the same dissatisfaction was prevalent.

Games designer Chris Crawford whose living room hosted GDC in its first form, pronounced the industry "dead". Seamus Blackley, the man who co-created the Xbox, expressed bewilderment at the inability of games to be

SONY REVEALS GOD OF WAR II

THE PS2 EPIC RETURNS IN 2007

In 2005, SCEA's historical adventure *God Of War* deservedly garnered several 'Game Of The Year' awards, and at this year's GDC Sony announced that the Santa Monica studios would be bringing ex-Spartan warrior turned God of War Kratos back exclusively to the PlayStation2.

Continuing on from the original with Kratos sat atop his Olympus throne, *God Of War II* will embark on a new epic journey that will change the fate of both mortals and gods. The sequel will feature all-new characters and mythological beasts from classic Greek lore that will attempt to stop Kratos on his quest, from the ever-popular Cyclops and Cerebus to the winged Gryphon and much more.

The exploration in *God Of War II* promises to surpass the darkest recesses of Greek mythology from the original, with players traversing through undiscovered terrain such as the Sisters of Fate to the Dark Swap. Naturally, Kratos will have a huge collection of combat moves from which to dispense of the enemies and bosses he encounters, including the combo attacks of the original and a whole new set of moves and magic; with magic based upon elements such as wind and ice. Of course, the popular puzzle-solving element makes a welcome return. All hail the return of the king.

"THE GAMES INDUSTRY IS DEAD. NOW, WHEN I SAY DEAD I DON'T MEAN TOTALLY DEAD, I MEAN **BRAIN DEAD.** THE PRODUCT IS GOING OUT THE DOOR, **MONEY IS COMING IN.** BUT WHAT'S UP HERE? NOTHING. THERE'S NO CREATIVITY. **THERE'S NO CREATIVE LIFE IN THIS INDUSTRY AT ALL.** IT'S JUST A DEAD CREATURE. WE PUT FOOD IN, SHIT COMES OUT"

CHRIS CRAWFORD, GDC FOUNDER AND GAME DESIGNER – OH LOOK, SOMEONE ELSE COMPLAINING ABOUT THE STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

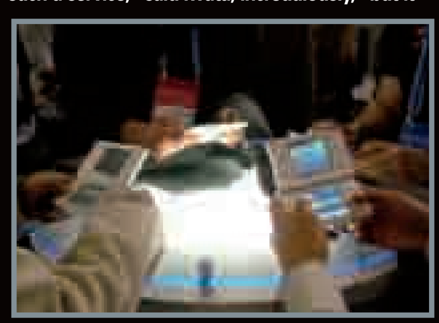
meaningful. There was much groaning, with games being compared to other artforms – films, comic books, and the emotional power of their material, etc – and despite the fact that the panel didn't seem to have a clear indication of what it wanted out of this, it was evident that it wanted games to buck up their ideas. Something that, just hours before, Nintendo president Satoru Iwata challenged the thousands of developers to do as well.

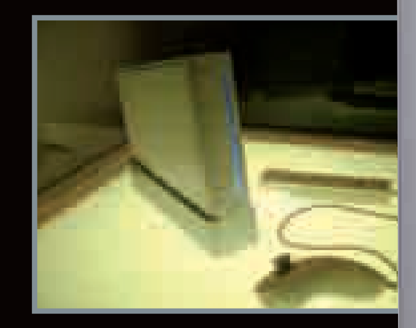
Using the company's new *Brain Age* title as a case study, he talked about 'disrupting development' and introducing new ideas into the creation process, before criticising the industry's acceleration toward 'big' games with huge budgets and predictable content. "It's understandable why publishers rely on sequels," Iwata muses, "but why have a bookstore when you can only buy expensive encyclopaedias. Where are the romance novels? Too often, people with fresh ideas don't have a chance."

Certainly, the audience agreed with Iwata's message. With the crowds hooked on his every word, literally screaming when he announced that each person in the room would get a free game, there was a slight sense that he was preaching to the converted. There was even a bit of religious denial, as attendees overlooked the contradictory fact that, after denouncing sequels and familiarity, Iwata revealed a *Zelda* game for the DS, and that old Mega Drive games would be available via the Nintendo Wii's 'Virtual Console' downloadable database. But, aware of this, Iwata turned the latter point into a chance to also underline the move toward digital distribution, calling Virtual Console "the iTunes of games". "Others may offer such a service," said Iwata, incredulously, "but it will not be the same. For us it is a true innovation, true disruption."

Such 'disruption' is being targeted by companies up and down the games industry food chain. One part of GDC is the Independent Games Festival. Most entrants distribute their games online. Introversion's *Darwinia*, which won three of the IGF awards, has sold more copies of its game via Valve's Steam than it has in its entire shelf life in the shops. Indie MMO *Dofus* has no boxed product to get you started – you just download it and pay a few quid every month.

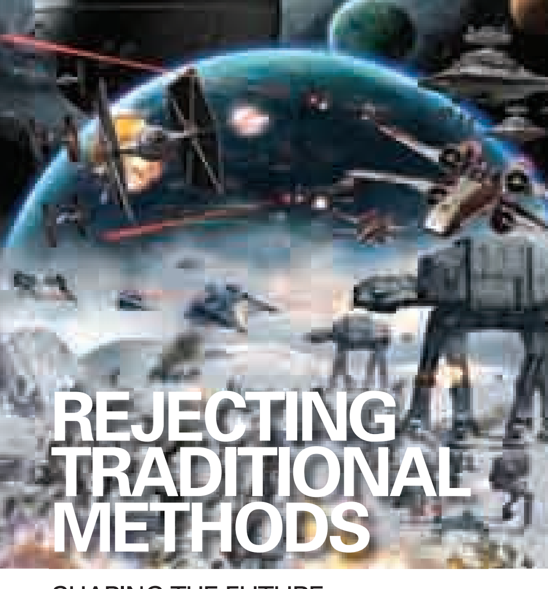
In truth, we won't see the real effects of GDC 2006's drum banging for a year or two at least. But when we do, things could be quite different. Valve has





already turned episodic gaming from a possibility into a reality. In the future, we'll be getting this content not just to PC, but via consoles too. Downloadable *Phoenix Wright* episodes; an FPS based on *Lost*, where new episodes are downloaded after the 'normal' TV broadcast; a version of *Buzz!* where you buy the question packs online the way you would *Trivial Pursuit*; *World Of Warcraft* that's free to access but which you need to use real money to buy items.

All speculation on our part, but now grounded in reality, not fantasy. Developers, certainly, want to make this new kind of content. And as long as it's good content, we'll want to play it.



REJECTING TRADITIONAL METHODS

SHAPING THE FUTURE

LucasArts hosted a lecture at GDC on its convergence with sister company Industrial Light And Magic. Over the past two years, LucasArts has contracted and expanded, first laying off much of its game-making workforce and then integrating itself with ILM. Now, the world-famous effects house and the re-growing games company (there's a new Lucas Games studio opening in Singapore) share the same technology. Some may raise eyebrows and say this is your typical 'games will look more like movies' talk, but it has allowed the company to ram-raid the Hollywood production model so that, according to LucasArts' Chris Williams, the studio is ready to make better games. And it only reached that point by rejecting the games industry's traditional method.

Even Electronic Arts – notorious for leading the franchise-heavy sequel-hungry side of the industry – realises this. EA Los Angeles vice president Neil Young gave those that attended his lecture an inspiring message: that just a few people could come up with a concept that shapes the industry. His example was the team that devised the Face Maker technology found in *Tiger Woods* – and now *The Godfather* – which prefigured games' customisation movement. When this formula has made EA richer and richer (see *Need For Speed* and *The Sims*) and richer, it's clear that the company knows its stuff, whether you admire its games or not.



Games like *The Godfather* make use of the Face Maker technology.



LETTER FROM AMERICA

WITH GENUINE AMERICAN BRANDON SHEFFIELD

Hagger. He's needed a shave for a long while now.

"GIRLS WILL JOIN THE MARKET WHEN THE Wii COMES OUT. I'M WORRIED ABOUT US – WE KNOW WHAT WE LIKE, AND DON'T

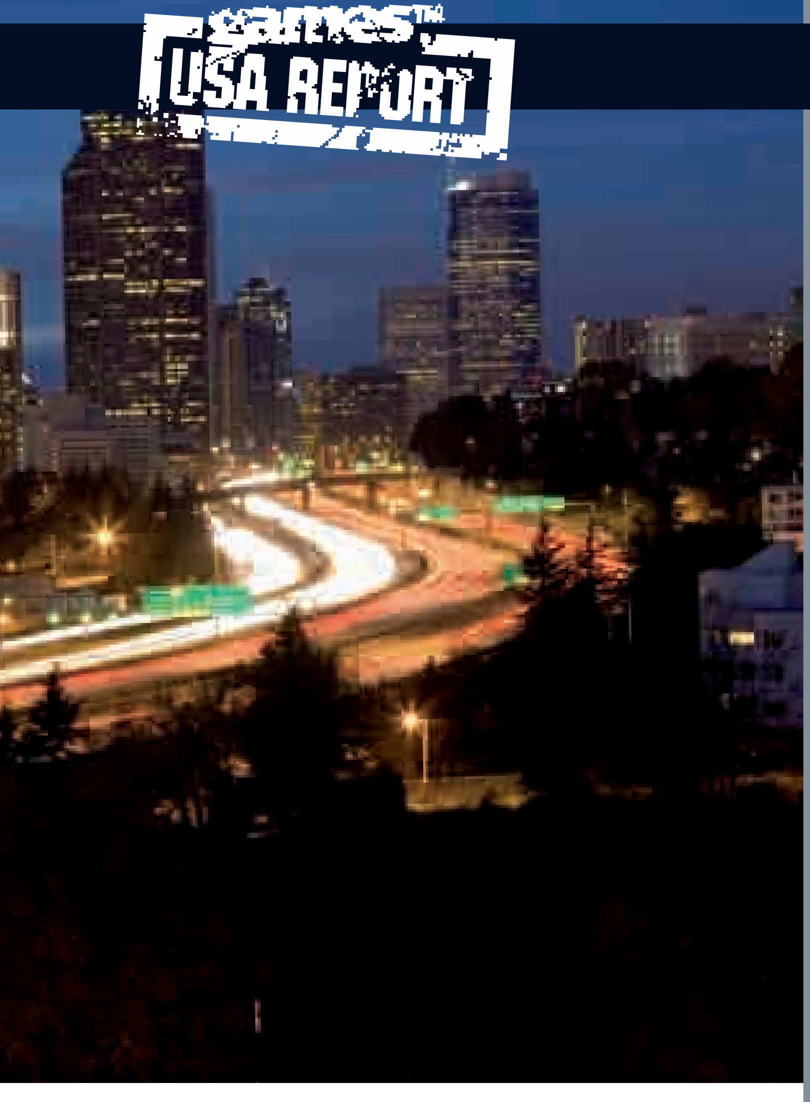
You know what really burns me? Sony Computer Entertainment America. It sets me aflame for an odd reason. Namely, PS2 budget titles and the lack thereof. Across the pond, where you live, small publishers can localise and bring to market such low-rent wonders as *Earth Defense Force*, *The Giant Beauty* and, if you're lucky, *Zombie Vs Ambulance*. This may be because your traditional titles are held up for an eternity, so they have to throw you a bone.

I imagine that without the whole PAL/NTSC thing, games would be translated into multiple western languages all at once, and released across our fair hemisphere in a more timely fashion. As it stands, games come out in English first and released in the US. Then it's ported, and translated, and poked at with a stick till it's finally slid into retail much to the chagrin of the powers that be. They really don't want you to have games, do they? And I've always marvelled at how much easier, faster, and cheaper it is for you to import games from the US. They admonish you for it but it's their own fault, isn't it? But as is my way, I do digress.

The point is, you cats get these D3 Publisher-funded, Japan-originating budget games; and you should exploit this. As you should know by now, these titles feel like a throwback to the days of wacky Nintendo carts with that unmistakable eastern flair that makes you wonder how they even came up with the idea. Granted, they're not of the best quality, but they're a damn sight better than what we come up with here. How many games about American gangs can one stomach? I'd take *Earth Defense Force II*, a game in which everything in the world is destructible, over *25 To Life* any day.

505 Gamestreet in Italy is one of your best assets for budget publishing. It brings out cheap titles like *The Splatter Action* (called *Splatter Master* there) featuring a pumpkin-headed boy with a chainsaw, tearing through everything in sight in a shower of gore. You also get the previously mentioned *Giant Beauty* (called *Demolition Girl* here) – a Godzilla-sized gal in a bikini, who destroys everything. Not only those, they also bring out shooters like *XII Stag* and *GigaWing Generations*, and Grasshopper Manufacture's (of *killer7* fame) visual horror novel *Michigan*.

The problem is that Sony's approval system is a bit unusual. Why is it that well-formed but cheaply made titles like *Earth Defense Force II* don't come out (I mention it again as it's truly stellar), when *Final Fight: Streetwise* and *Crime Life: Gang Wars* make it through? I'm telling you from a place of knowledge, it's not for lack of trying. Part of the reason those obviously flawed games came out is because they had major publishers behind them, Capcom and Konami respectively. The other reason is that the feature set is so robust on paper (number of levels, moves, gang signs, bitches to shoot, pop culture references, and so on). The reason these budget games don't come out is because Sony knows damn well they only cost ¥2,000 in their



I'M NOT WORRIED ABOUT THEM. NEED TO BE TOLD WHAT'S COOL"

native territories. That's an instant red flag for SCEA meaning you either package your games in bundles, or you just leave them alone.

It's an issue of perceived quality – one which will diminish once the PS3 comes out – and Sony doesn't care how its ageing PS2 is looked upon. Frankly, I think Sony's attempt to keep the console high-brow is what stops games being appreciated as something more than a kid's medium, even today. With movies, we have genres, and we have niches. There's something to serve every taste and demographic. We don't have that with games. We only target a select group of people – namely sweaty boys who breathe through their mouths and touch themselves when Lara Croft emerges from a pool of water.

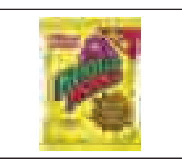
There's talk of serving the female market, but what about those males who may not feel the cop-killing power fantasy? What if we like puzzles? What if we like planes scrolling around? What if our power fantasy is just plain different (I'm not dissing power fantasy as a concept, here)? Well, we're out in the cold. Girls will join the market when the Wii comes out. I'm not worried about them. I'm worried about us – we know what we like, and don't need to be told what's cool. As long as there are warped ideas of what quality means – namely budget, backer, and 'does it make Sony look good?' – we're in trouble. America is the biggest market for games, and if we don't lead the way, we skew the entire industry. So buy those budget games while you can; you just might change the world.

Many thanks

Brandon

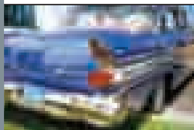
MISS ABOUT BRITAIN…

Monster Munch



LOVE ABOUT AMERICA…

Big Cars



AMERIKAAN

PRODUCTS, PLACES, SERVICES AND EVENTS FROM THE LAND OF THE FREE

THE MAGICAL DEFLATING

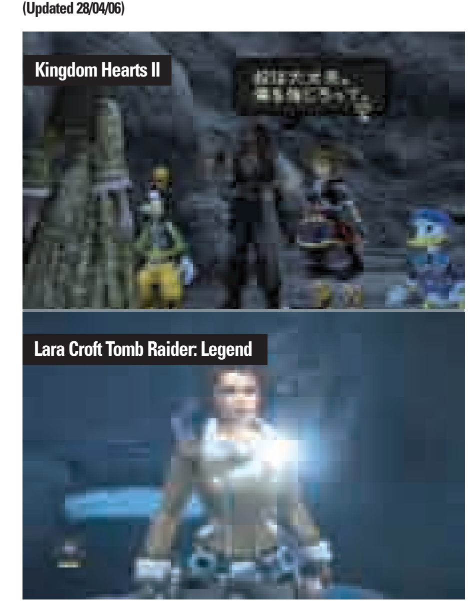


Here's something you don't hear every day. At a restaurant/strip club (!) in Eugene, Oregon, a woman was swinging round the pole to some Eighties one-hit wonder. Her implants were so old (and bad, you could see the scars), that when she swung round the pole, her breasts caved in on themselves, becoming concavities of grotesque silicone.

US MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Kingdom Hearts II	Square Enix	PS2
2	Major League Baseball 2K6	2K Sports	PS2
3	The Godfather: The Game	Electronic Arts	PS2
4	Fight Night Round 3	EA Sports	PS2
5	Major League Baseball 2K6	2K Sports	Xbox
6	Lara Croft Tomb Raider: Legend	Eidos	PS2
7	Black	Electronic Arts	PS2
8	NBA Ballers: Phenom	Midway	PS2
9	Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter	Ubisoft	Xbox
10	The Godfather: The Game	Electronic Arts	Xbox

(Updated 28/04/06)


Kingdom Hearts II

Lara Croft Tomb Raider: Legend



KONGETSU*

WITH JAPANESE CORRESPONDENT TIM ROGERS

"AN ARCADE FEATURING A VF5 CABINET IS LIKE A SCENE IN A NINETIES SCHOOL TO HANG OUT IN A DRUG LORD'S METAL-ROCK-BLASTING

I wish I lived near an arcade… I spent months choosing where to live. I got the apartment (in a building built by MUJI) and furnished it entirely with MUJI housewares; I'll have a Sony Bravia 40-inch HDTV when I finally order it. I have my guitars, my coffee table, my sofa. It'll be perfect. I can play my Xbox 360 (I account for one per cent of 360-owners here) on Live if I want to talk to anyone (again, about 99 other people). Or at least that's what I thought.

I chose my apartment based on its close proximity to the city of Ueno, where I can board the Ginza Line and be at work in 19 minutes. My front door is one minute from the station.

Now I wish I lived in a town with an arcade because I've seen *Virtua Fighter 5*. So what's so great about it? It has nice graphics, amazing textures, and hardcore fighting action, yes. The cabinets are the greatest ever made (big, wide, finished with matte aluminium, widescreen HDTV displays), yes. That's not why I want to live in an arcade, however.

I've seen people on the Internet saying that *VF5* is their dream cabinet, and that they'd love to have it in their homes. These people are wrong. *Virtua Fighter 5* is an arcade game that needs to be in an arcade. Those gorgeous cabinets are lined up back to back – as with most Japanese fighting game cabinets – there are eight to a block, meaning four two-player matches can go on at once. So far, as the game is only in 'location test', those cabinets are always in use. Even if I've only been able to play it once (I won a match, I lost a match, I got back in line), I don't mind spectating; it's so much fun to watch this game. American kids used to line up in arcades and watch dumb games like *Mortal Kombat*, then grew to realise how shallow those games were. The vision of the fighting game was too immature back then; *VF5* is what *Mortal Kombat* wanted to be, yet couldn't because the right technology didn't exist yet.

The corner of an arcade featuring a *VF5* cabinet setup is like a scene in a Nineties sci-fi movie where kids skip school to hang out in a drug lord's metal-rock-blasting subterranean pit of youth-temptation. A man in his mid-twenties is crying – that 'future' that movies told us would come, that 'future' we gave up all hope of when we graduated university and decided to fill an apartment with MUJI housewares, it's not gone. It just took a little too long to get here – and now it's here. Well, it will be in July.

The best part of the *VF5* spectator experience is the Virtua Fighter Channel, an HD display that shows live or recorded matches from all over the country. Paying ¥500 gets you a card which you can configure to include your name, the name of your 'team' and your character's appearance. You can even edit your character's ring intro, which is great. If your fighter works his way up to the top of the nationwide ladder, then spectators watching



SCI-FI MOVIE WHERE KIDS SKIP PIT OF YOUTH TEMPTATION”

the channel will see your character, with your name, wearing the clothes you gave him and performing the intro animation you shot every time the ranking list scrolls by. This is the original arcade high-scores chart, evolved. It will enslave legions of players. *VF4: Evolution* and *Tekken 5* had similar systems; this one just pulls out all the stops. The network system Sega set up for *Tekken 5* grew into something amazing. It's like Sega was a TV manufacturer, selling Namco the non-HDMI-compatible TV just so it could afford to make the HDMI-compatible one.

I think about HDTVs too much lately. I should buy one. Okay, I'm online now. There, I ordered one. Wow. I feel wonderful and terrible all at once. Man. What am I going to play on it? *VF4: Evolution*? I'm scared to say, I believe that bridge has been burnt, friends. Why the hell did I order this TV? PlayStation3 is half a year away.

Kind regards



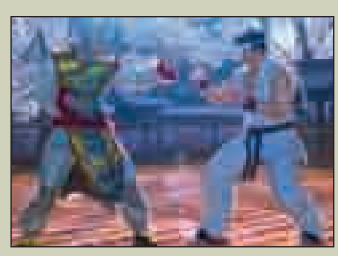


TEACH YOURSELF JAPANESE

LESSON 44:

CONVERSING WITH A JAPANESE GIRL WHO READS TOO MUCH GIRLY-BOY MANGA

Tomodachi wa ore no ie ni tomatta.	My friend stayed over at my [masculine] place.
Otoko tomodachi ka! Suteki na yoru sugosemashita ka?	A male friend? Did you have a lovely evening?
Souda. Ongaku kiiteta. Gitaa hiiteta.	Yeah. We listened to music. We played guitar.
Kare wa anata no gitaa wo hiita koto aru no ka? Moshikashitara anata wa kare no gitaa wo hiku kai?	Has he ever played your guitar, or do you play his?
Tokidoki wakachiaundakedo. Tatoeba kinou kare wa jibun no AIPODDO wo ore no EKKUSU BOKKUSU ni tsunagatte--	We share, I guess. Last night he plugged his iPod into my Xbox.



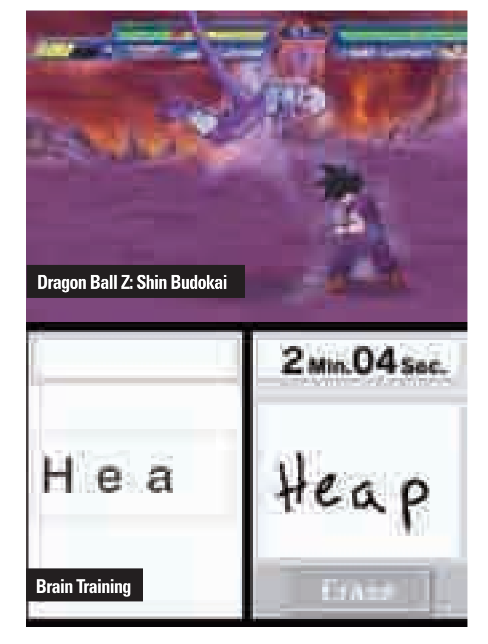
ONLINE COMPATIBLE

A guy in my office said that he'd play *VF5* if it were online on the PS3. I told him this was missing the point. He said, "What is the point, then?" I told him the 'point' was to be there in that arcade, wrapped up in the game. I explained how, long ago, Yu Suzuki said that he could see the day when *Virtua Fighter* would be regarded a 'sport'. The guy didn't buy this. Oh well. I tried to explain about the Virtua Fighter Channel, and how just standing there in the arcade, with a can of Coke can make you feel like a stockbroker in the future (or something), and he said, "You know, they could easily emulate that over PS3 online". I guess he was right. Though, hell, if that's not a lack of imagination… I told him, you know, when you play using a membership card you can download your replays online from Sega. He said, "They should make Virtua Fighter Channel a real TV channel. 24 hours a day so I can watch it at home. Maybe every night they'd show highlights. I could go to the arcade, play like a superstar, and have my fight show up on TV at night. Yes… I could go to the arcade". I think he has been converted?!

JAPANESE MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Mother 3	Nintendo	GBA
2	Dragon Quest: YYMD	Square-Enix	PS2
3	FFXI: Treasures Of Aht Urhgan	Square-Enix	PS2
4	Brain Training 2	Nintendo	DS
5	Dragon Ball Z: Shin Budokai	Atari	PSP
6	Okami	Capcom	PS2
7	Brain Training	Nintendo	DS
8	Animal Crossing: Wild World	Nintendo	DS
9	English Training	Nintendo	DS
10	Pokémon: Road To Diamond & Pearl	Nintendo	DS

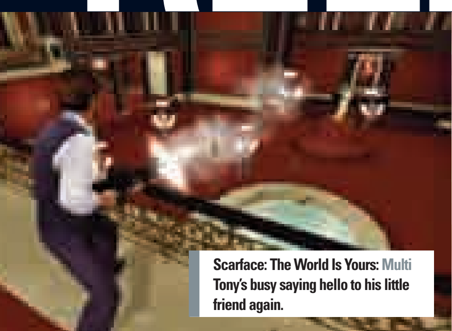
(Updated week ending 23/04/06)



Dragon Ball Z: Shin Budokai

Brain Training

RELEASE LISTS


Scarface: The World Is Yours: Multi
Tony's busy saying hello to his little friend again.


Splinter Cell Double Agent: Multi
The continuing adventures of Sam Fisher can't come soon enough.

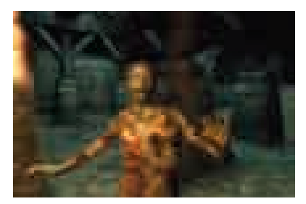

Super Monkey Ball Adventure: Multi
Monkeys. Balls. This concept will never ever get old.


gamesTM MOST PLAYED

THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

Format: Xbox 360
Publisher: 2K Games

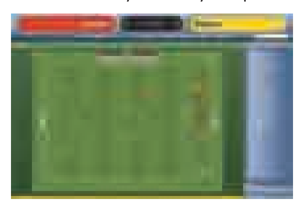
It's mere weeks since it was released, and already its reputation is assured. Sure, a game this big has to be played for longer than others, but that's not why it makes our top three. Every minute of every hour we secretly long to be back in Oblivion's warm embrace. It's sad, but we don't care.



FOOTBALL MANAGER HANDHELD

Format: PSP
Publisher: Sega

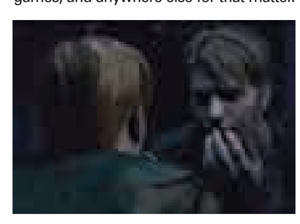
The sapper of countless man-hours makes its handheld debut. If you thought it was tempting before, well, now you can play it anywhere. Plus it's one of the few games that doesn't suffer as a result of the PSP's tricky control layout – perfect.



SILENT HILL 2

Format: PS2
Publisher: Konami

Our exploration of horror games required serious research, but it was unanimous that *Silent Hill 2* rules the roost. It may not have been a pioneer, but if horror's all about being shit-scared then it's a hands-down winner. Pyramid Head and chums are behind some of the biggest frights in games, and anywhere else for that matter.



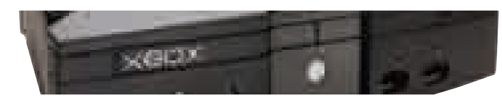
PLAYSTATION2

Month	Title	Publisher	
MAY '06			
19 May	The Da Vinci Code	2K Games	
26 May	Dance Factory	Codemasters	
TBC	Hitman: Blood Money	Eidos	Wanted
TBC	Panzer Elite Action	JoWood	
TBC	Scarface: The World Is Yours	VU Games	
TBC	Tourist Trophy	Sony	
TBC	Urban Chaos: Riot Response	Eidos	
JUNE '06			
TBC	America's Army: Rise Of A Soldier	Ubisoft	
TBC	Jaws	THQ	
TBC	Phantasy Star Universe	Sega	
TBC	Super Monkey Ball Adventure	Sega	
JULY '06			
28 July	WWII: Air Supremacy	Midas	
Q2 '06			
TBC	And1 Streetball	Ubisoft	
TBC	Aquanox: The Angel's Tears	JoWood	
TBC	Atelier Iris: Eternal Mana	Koei	
TBC	Battlestations: Midway	SCi	
TBC	Bully	Rockstar	
TBC	Castlevania: Curse Of Darkness	Konami	
TBC	Combat Elite: WWII Paratroopers	Koch Media	
TBC	Dynasty Warriors 5: Empires	Koei	
TBC	Fear And Respect	Midway	
TBC	Monster House	THQ	
TBC	Yakuza	Sega	Wanted
TBC '06			
TBC	25 To Life	Eidos	
TBC	Crimson Tears	Capcom	
TBC	D1rT	Koch Media	
TBC	Final Fantasy XII	Sony	
TBC	Forbidden Siren 2	Sony	
TBC	Kingdom Hearts II	Sony	
TBC	Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence	Konami	
TBC	Mortal Kombat: Armageddon	Midway	
TBC	Okami	Capcom	
TBC	Phantasy Star Universe	Sega	
TBC	Pro Evolution Soccer 6	Konami	
TBC	SpyHunter: Nowhere To Run	Midway	
TBC	The Regiment	Konami	



GAMECUBE

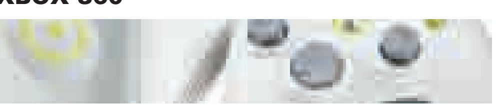
Month	Title	Publisher	
MAY '06			
1 May	Franklin: A Birthday Surprise	The Games Factory	
26 May	Chibi-Robo	Nintendo	
TBC	X-Men: The Official Game	Activision	
JUNE '06			
23 June	Harvest Moon: Magical Melody	Rising Star	Wanted
23 June	Over The Hedge	Activision	
TBC	Super Monkey Ball Adventure	Sega	
JULY '06			
14 July	Cars	THQ	
28 July	Monster House	THQ	
TBC '06			
TBC	Chaos Field	O3 Entertainment	
TBC	Splinter Cell: Double Agent	Ubisoft	
TBC	Zelda: The Twilight Princess	Nintendo	Wanted



XBOX

Month	Title	Publisher	
MAY '06			
19 May	The Da Vinci Code	2K Games	
TBC	Hitman: Blood Money	Eidos	
TBC	Pac-Man World 3	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Urban Chaos: Riot Response	Eidos	
TBC	X-Men: The Official Game	Activision	
JUNE '06			
09 June	FlatOut 2	Empire	
09 June	Sensible Soccer	Kuju	
TBC	Micro Machines V4	Codemasters	Wanted
TBC	Super Monkey Ball Adventure	Sega	
JULY '06			
07 July	World Tour Golf	Oxygen	
Q2 '06			
TBC	America's Army: Rise Of A Soldier	Ubisoft	
TBC	American McGee Presents: Bad Day LA	Enlight	
TBC	Bully	Rockstar	Wanted
TBC	Castlevania: Curse Of Darkness	Konami	
TBC	Fear And Respect	Midway	
TBC	Scarface: The World Is Yours	VU Games	
TBC '06			
TBC	25 To Life	Eidos	
TBC	Mortal Kombat: Armageddon	Midway	
TBC	Panzer Elite Action	JoWood	
TBC	Splinter Cell Double Agent	Ubisoft	
TBC	StarCraft: Ghost	Blizzard	

XBOX 360



Month	Title	Publisher	
MAY '06			
26 May	Over G	Ubisoft	
26 May	Rockstar Presents Table Tennis	Rockstar	Wanted
TBC	X-Men: The Official Game	Activision	
JUNE '06			
09 June	MotoGP '06	THQ	

CALM YOUR FEVERISH ANTICIPATION WITH OUR COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF FORTHCOMING RELEASES



Prey: Xbox 360 Yet another FPS for the next-generation.

Sensible Soccer: Multi A seemingly pointless update of a game that's barely aged even 15 years on.

SpyHunter: Nowhere To Run: Multi Another re-tread of the arcade classic. Could be good. Could be bobbins.

Ninety-Nine Nights: Xbox 360 Simply enormous battle simulator from the maker of *Kingdom Of Heroes*.

23 June	Test Drive Unlimited	Atari	
Q2 '06			
TBC	Chromehounds	Sega	
TBC	Dynasty Warriors 5 Empires	Koei	
TBC	Prey	2K Games	Wanted
TBC	TimeShift	Atari	Wanted
TBC '06			
TBC	AITD: Near Death Investigation	Atari	
TBC	BioShock	2K Games	
TBC	Blue Dragon	Microsoft	
TBC	Dead Rising	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	Final Fantasy XI	Sega	
TBC	Frame City Killer	Namco	
TBC	Gears Of War	Microsoft	
TBC	Huxley	Webzen	
TBC	Lost Planet	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	Ninety-Nine Nights	Microsoft	
TBC	Possessed	Namco	
TBC	Saint's Row	THQ	
TBC	Sonic The Hedgehog	Sega	
TBC	Splinter Cell Double Agent	Ubisoft	
TBC	Stranglehold	Midway	
TBC	The Darkness	2K Games	
TBC	Too Human	Microsoft	

PC



Month	Title	Publisher	
MAY '06			
19 May	Heroes Of Might And Magic V	Ubisoft	
19 May	The Da Vinci Code	2K Games	
19 May	X-Men: The Official Game	Activision	
26 May	Hitman: Blood Money	Eidos	
26 May	True Crime: New York City	Koch	
26 May	Unreal Tournament 2007	Midway	
JUNE '06			
08 June	Prey	2K Games	
09 June	Heart Of Empire: Rome	Deep Silver	
09 June	Neverwinter Nights 2	Atari	
28 June	Rise & Fall: Civilizations At War	Midway	
JULY '06			
TBC	WOW: The Burning Crusade	Blizzard	Wanted
Q2 '06			
TBC	American McGee Presents: Bad Day LA	Enlight	
TBC '06			
TBC	Company Of Heroes	THQ	
TBC	Enemy Territory: Quake Wars	Activision	
TBC	Gothic III	JoWood	
TBC	Hellgate: London	Namco	
TBC	Reservoir Dogs	Eidos	
TBC	S.T.A.L.K.E.R: Shadow Of Chernobyl	THQ	Wanted
TBC	Spore	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Tabula Rasa	NCSoft	Wanted
TBC	Titan Quest	THQ	

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Month	Title	Publisher	
MAY '06			
26 May	Drill Dozer	Nintendo	
JUNE '06			
02 June	Final Fantasy IV	Nintendo	
23 June	Over The Hedge	Activision	
30 June	Pirates Of The Caribbean 2	Buena Vista	
TBC	WarioWare Twisted!	Nintendo	Wanted

PLAYSTATION PORTABLE

Month	Title	Publisher	
MAY '06			
19 May	Lara Croft Tomb Raider: Legend	Eidos	
26 May	Viewtiful Joe: Red Hot Rumble	Capcom	
TBC	The Con	Sony	
JUNE '06			
28 June	PoPoLoCrois	Agetec Inc.	
TBC	Def Jam Fight For NY: Takeover	EA	
TBC	Infected	Majesco	
TBC	Super Monkey Ball Adventure	Sega	Wanted
JULY '06			
07 July	World Tour Golf	Oxygen	
TBC '06			
TBC	Daxter	Sony	
TBC	Dragon Ball Z Shin Budokai	Atari	
TBC	Driv3r	Atari	
TBC	Gangs Of London	Sony	
TBC	Gran Turismo 4: Mobile	Sony	
TBC	NBA Ballers Rebound	Midway	
TBC	Talkman	Sony	Wanted

NINTENDO DS

Month	Title	Publisher	
MAY '06			
26 May	Puyo Pop Fever	Ignition	
26 May	Super Princess Peach	Nintendo	
TBC	Dragon Booster	Konami	
JUNE '06			
09 June	Prof Kawashima's Brain Training	Nintendo	
30 June	New Super Mario Bros	Nintendo	
TBC	Micro Machines V4	Codemasters	
JULY '06			
TBC	Electroplankton	Nintendo	
Q2 '06			
TBC	Boktai 2	Konami	
TBC	Harvest Moon	Rising Star	
TBC	Mega Man Battle Network 5	Capcom	
TBC '06			
TBC	Last Ninja	Play It	
TBC	Metroid Prime Pinball	Nintendo	
TBC	Pokémon Diamond/Pearl	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Zelda: Phantom Hourglass	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Viewtiful Joe: Double Trouble	Capcom	

PLEASE NOTE: While every effort has been made to ensure these dates are correct at the time of going to press, they are liable to change at short notice. Which is completely beyond our control, so don't go giving us evils.

gamesTM ON THE HORIZON

RAINBOW SIX: VEGAS

Format: Multiformat
Publisher: Ubisoft

The prospect of *Rainbow Six* getting back to its best is enough to raise a few half-hearted cheers of celebration. The prospect of chasing down evil terrorists against the backdrop of the world capital of glitz and sleaze is enough to make us dance around the room. We can sum it all up in two words: innocent bystanders.



OKAMI

Format: PS2
Publisher: Capcom

A game based on Japanese folklore where you play a wolf, isn't a project you link with Capcom, lord of videogame violence and mayhem. That a PS2 title can look amazing next to the 360 is some feat, but *Okami* does it with a style and imagination seldom seen on any console.



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: PHANTOM HOURGLASS

Format: Nintendo DS
Publisher: Nintendo

While *The Twilight Princess* is still some way off, early footage of *Phantom Hourglass* suggests this could be the perfect reserve till it arrives. Making cunning use of the stylus – to make notes on the map and plan weapon flight paths – this could be Link's return to form.




Don't pick up that key… **Super Mario All-Stars, SNES [Nintendo] 1993**



TEST DRIVE UNLIMITED

"PARTICIPATE IN 16-PLAYER RACES OR TAKE VEHICLES FOR A DRIVE ON OVER 1,000 MILES OF DIVERSE HAWAIIAN ROADS AND PASS BY THOUSANDS OF OTHER REAL PLAYERS"

TEST DRIVE UNLIMITED PRESS RELEASE



VIDEOGAMES MATHS

4UNLIMITED

PGR3 + SECOND LIFE x JEREMY CLARKSON = TEST DRIVE UNLIMITED

There may be crashes, but there'll be no mangled wrecks. These cars are beautiful and aim to stay that way.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

There was a time before *Gran Turismo* when you played *V-Rally* and enjoyed it because it was incomparably good. Eden Studios' biggest titles have been in the *V-Rally* series. Based in Lyon, France, Eden has gone beyond *Gran Turismo*.

HISTORY

- AITD: NEAR DEATH INVESTIGATION 2006 [Multi]
- KYA: DARK LINEAGE 2004 [PS2]
- V-RALLY 3 2003 [Multi]



DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360
ORIGIN: France
PUBLISHER: Atari
DEVELOPER: Eden Games
RELEASE: Sept '06
GENRE: Racing
PLAYERS: 2-1,000+ Online

CONCEPT

You live in Hawaii along with a variable number of other online players, and your entire life is dedicated to driving high-performance, luxury sports cars and living 'the lifestyle'.

THE FIRST REAL DRIVING GAME TO ENABLE IRONIC SEXISM SHOWS A PATH TO YOUR DRIVING FUTURE

Transport as fashion accessory. Discuss. A middle-aged man in a Ferrari looks pathetic unless he's Tom Selleck. This fact is demonstrated every bank holiday on the highways and byways of this fair land. We could go further and suggest (though not so elegantly prove) that the same goes for most of the imperfect revenants of the primordial ooze that make up the rest of us too, because who wouldn't look out of place in a high-class vehicle designed to be driven outside the speed limit? Richard Madeley? Channel Four News' Jon Snow? We'd love him for an uncle but wouldn't want to see him revving up next to us as we leave Tescos. You see, high-end sports cars aren't for everyone, but *Test Drive Unlimited* will be. Sweet mother, it's beautiful.

Its construction is car porn fantasy buttressed by satellite imagery, massive online connectivity and some really pretty graphics; the latest *Test Drive* is a technical achievement that anyone can appreciate. A few seconds behind the wheel of a Jaguar tells you that you won't be drifting round corners for points. Take the toughest settings on the most esoteric F1 racing game and put that behaviour into a luxury car. Now you're in Hawaii, in your Shelby, you can wind up the electric windows independently, honk the horn and play with the wipers. Pull out gently, look both ways with the left analogue stick, and ease her away. You don't want to damage the paintwork; it costs a packet.

Technology that helped bomb London, put a monkey into space, and inspired the worst *Bond* movie helped bring you this immaculate Hawaii. Look at your on-screen (in-car) Sat Nav system and you'll see the roads around you. Zoom out and you'll see the whole block. Keep zooming out and you get a series of blocks, the town, the island, the entire planet. There are potentially thousands of people out there all wondering what to do, just like you. They're online because this is massively multi-player. Race them. Watch them.

So *Test Drive* goes online. There are no gangs, drugs or ASBO kids to sully this tropical wonderland. You start off poor and earn money by winning races and performing tasks, you then get richer and visit showrooms where you can buy cars and accessories right out of this year's catalogue. This isn't a cold-hearted lesson in financial reward; you can go to a showroom and test drive any car you want for only a few dollars. The joy is in the driving, the rest is garnish. Very welcome garnish and Gamerscore fodder.

When you start the game, you create yourself. While a psychologist could get acres out of that last sentence we'll rephrase it and say that the game starts with an avatar-creation system that shares the rest of the game's taste for depth. You can dress up in clothes labelled Ben Sherman and Marc Ecko, and even if you usually follow such attired people around with an air pistol, you'll want to ponce up in their uniform because you're in Hawaii, and driving a Mercedes.

With the surface quality taken care of by space technology and the need for cross promotions, the game is left to play out. For the most part it isn't a game at all because if it is then so is a spin to Tescos. You play within it, rather than play it. It's a 'sandbox'. Where you go and what you do is up to you. There's

> "THERE ARE NO GANGS, DRUGS OR ASBO KIDS HANGING IN ALLEYWAYS TO SULLY THIS TROPICAL WONDERLAND"

IT'S IN THE TREES

"In the elder days of art, builders wrought with greatest care each minute and unseen part, for the gods were everywhere." *Test Drive Unlimited* expects you to examine every aspect of its creation, so you're not limited to enjoying the scene from the road across to a few trees flanking a boulevard. The island exists to be explored; there are no invisible cordons and no boundaries. You could go for a wander, get a message from a friend that they'd like a race, and then order a car to be delivered to your location while you watch the birds.



Hawaii is scrumptious, and it's up to you whether you want to race or just pootle around the town and countryside for a bit.



no story arc to chase, and you don't have to compete to have fun because the island is huge and has enough varied topology to provide road races of near infinite (okay, let's just say gigantic) variety. You can drive a hot chick back from a shopping spree in Waikiki within a time limit, and get a tip. You can organise a massive online race through the forests and towns. You can, of course, just drive down by the coast and play with your electric windows and honk your horn again.

We picked up the hot chick – while playing as a hot chick – and then played with the windows and checked out her legs. Again, a psychologist could read lots into that so we'll rephrase it and say that our avatar was female and the code we drove only had responses installed for a male. The resulting interaction was made more hilarious by the HD soundtrack with a funky Brock Landers beat. An ideal time to check out the in-car camera and enjoy the interior 3D modelling, but it would be impossible for the Pope not to think about lesbians and Magnum PI at the same time. She said that we drove 'hard'. We crashed. We don't dream in such clarity.

Money would have been earned had we driven like a *Crazy Taxi* driver, but you're in an accurately modelled Saleen, and Hawaii needs to be explored. There is, of course, more to it than just raunchy errands. Missions reveal themselves everywhere – if you feel like a street race just flash a passing car marked with a gamertag. Pop to the clothes store or get some new furnishings for your pad. Buy a mansion just like the one Magnum lived in. You'll want a bigger place, sooner or later you'll need the garage space.

It's hard to imagine anyone not impressed with *Unlimited*. It's the sort of title that upsets journalists because they have to write about benchmarks being raised again, and they're running out of words for benchmark. Eden has even included motorbikes. Wow. You can ride Ducatis too. We felt very young and somewhat inexperienced; Atari's demonstrator du jour drove like Steve McQueen. After busting a red light, we only managed to escape the cops because of a pile up caused by an online player – we never did get the shopping home in time. Despite driving with the gusto of a cattle rustler, there was no damage to the vehicles because this is as close to an interactive advert as you're likely to get before manufacturers make similar games themselves and pipe them down to your 360 for free. Well, it worked for *America's Army*. Same principle, except they sell happiness and joy not dehumanisation and violent death. You can see a soldier get shot in the face, just don't expect to see a Ducati in flames. Not good for the image, see.

This is a fun place of sunshine and tropical storms. While it can be played offline with bots, the social online aspect makes it a driving MMORPG that could be played as much by friends that might otherwise chat while playing a casual round of *Bankshot Billiards 2* and fancy a drive as by those who are passionate about cars to the point where they count the holes in a vent. You can count them, there're all there. You can zoom in and take a picture, adjust the camera settings and send the image along with a note to the player that lost you the car in a race. We have yet to see how the game handles more than a handful of online players mixed with a world of bots, but if all goes well you can expect *Test Drive Unlimited* to join *Oblivion* in the list of games that define the difference between console generations. No jacket required. Yes, we know that Magnum drove a Ferrari 308 GTS. No, you don't get to drive one of those particular Ferraris. Yes, we do hope that the avatar creation will include moustaches.

"FOR THE MOST PART TEST DRIVE UNLIMITED ISN'T REALLY A GAME AT ALL BECAUSE IF IT IS THEN SO IS A QUICK SPIN TO TESCOS"

A RISKY GAME OF MONOPOLY?

When you place hundreds of people into a game world competition is inevitable: *Test Drive Unlimited* gives you over 120 cars and an island to enjoy, and then it goes a bit *Playboy: The Mansion* as you decide to start building nests. There are houses all over the island, ranging from hovels to somewhere you'd expect a drug dealer to live, and they'll be bought and sold between online players. You can even stake your house in races, which makes property ownership useful for those who want more start positions as well as a greater source of smugness.



Behind the wheel of a beautifully modelled 3D interior.

TEST DRIVE UNLIMITED
XBOX 360



"TEST DRIVE UNLIMITED IS A POWERFUL NEXT-GENERATION RACING TITLE THAT DRAWS UPON THE AMAZING ONLINE CAPABILITIES OF XBOX 360 AND OFFERS A FANTASTIC GAMING EXPERIENCE"
MARC METIS, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT OF MARKETING, ATARI

LOST PLANET

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q1 '07
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1 (2-32 Online)

CONCEPT

You are Wayne, space pirate extraordinaire and resident of an inhospitable ice planet. Fight death, the cold and really big insects in your struggle to survive.

THIS GAME WILL BE BRILLIANT. FACT!

Videogame plots are always ridiculous; the medium's unbridled creativity necessitates an outlandish story. Take *Lost Planet*. Set in a frozen wasteland, it tells of the struggle between humans and the Akrid – a race of malicious, insectoid aliens – for control of the planet's precious thermal energy. Okay, it's hardly kitchen-sink drama, but it's just the right side of crazy to remain compelling. So quite why *Lost Planet* insists on tipping the balance toward the completely absurd is a mystery. You see, the hero's name is Wayne. Wayne the space pirate.

Now forgive us if we don't fall to our knees, but surely a space pirate should be called Han or Henrik or Starbeard. Fortunately for Capcom, this oversight is not damaging to the game, because all the Waynes in the world can't disguise the fact that *Lost Planet* is looking very special.

The planet itself is splendidly realised. Huge, barren snowscapes lead into desolate cities which, in turn, lead to claustrophobic caverns. Despite the fantastic nature of the plot, great attention has been paid to authenticity. Burned out cars and vehicles litter the streets. Abandoned buildings are given identity and character. Even the depth of the snow varies dramatically; one moment you're running on the surface, the next you're struggling through a waist-high drift. The power of Xbox 360 allows the luxury of such details, but few games have taken advantage of that capability with such vigour.

As impressive as they are they're still just details. The meat of the game is in the action, and *Lost Planet* delivers this in spades. The third-person perspective allows a greater sense of space to deal with the hordes of enemies. Tiny, spider-like aliens pour forth from birthing pods; flocks of flying worms hang from the roofs of caves, attacking in droves at the slightest provocation; huge, indescribable creatures burst from the ground just asking for their spindly legs to be shot away by well-placed machine-gun fire; while gas-mask-wearing space pirates litter the landscape, defending their outposts with murderous intent.

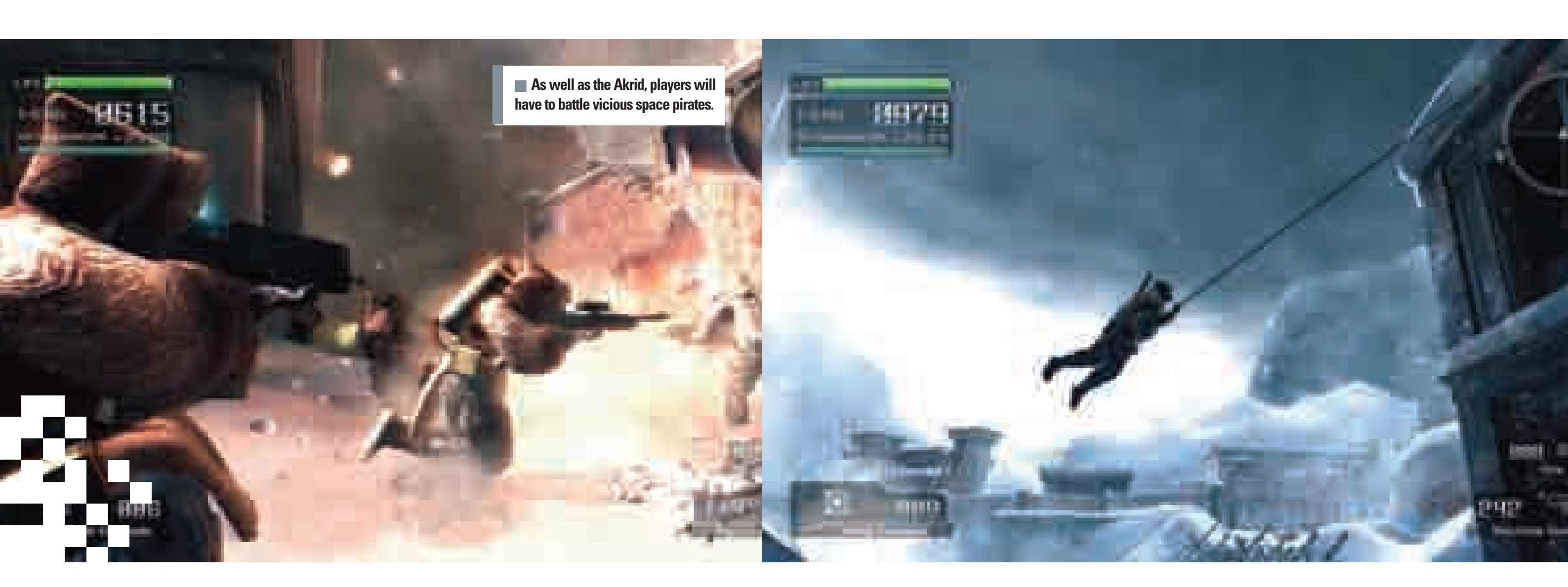
The volume of cannon fodder justifies some serious firepower, and besides the usual range of weapons, *Lost Planet* has one more ace up its sleeve: Vital Suits. With a design lying somewhere between a Mech and the Power Lifter from *Aliens*, Vital Suits are 'vital' to surviving the game's hairier moments. Each is capable of carrying a range of weapons, one on each arm. When standing in one of these steel behemoths, two Gatling guns blazing white-hot lead at the massed enemies, suddenly the harsh landscape doesn't seem so threatening.

Often when previewing games, the version we receive will be riddled with glitches, requiring effort to imagine what the finished article will look and play like. Not so with *Lost Planet*. The levels we tried were simply fantastic – beautiful, great to play, and packed with invention. Wayne or no Wayne, it's difficult to see where *Lost Planet* can possibly go wrong.

"THE REAL MEAT OF THE GAME LIES IN THE ACTION, AND LOST PLANET DELIVERS IN SPADES"

THE HEAT IS ON

As well as watching your ass for bad guys, in *Lost Planet* there is a second danger to consider: the cold. You are, after all, on a planet covered with ice and snow, and thermal energy is in short supply. Your body temperature is constantly falling, but the thermal energy can be found in tanks as well as in drums and by shooting enemies. Collecting these orange blobs will restore your plummeting body heat, but only for so long. It's an intriguing gameplay device that insures that you have to keep pushing forward, slaying your enemies and generally wreaking havoc. In our book, that's a very, very good thing.



As well as the Akrid, players will have to battle vicious space pirates.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Entering videogame legend with its seminal *Street Fighter* series, Capcom has grown into an industry powerhouse. Developing and publishing a wide range of games, Capcom's strength is undoubtedly action and adventure. If it's sleekly designed, visceral thrills you're after, there's no safer pair of hands.

HISTORY

- **VIEWTIFUL JOE** 2003 [Multi]
- **GENMA ONIMUSHA** 2002 [Multi]
- **DEVIL MAY CRY** 2001 [PS2]

Enemy aliens range in size from the tiny to the gargantuan.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

BABY, IT'S COLD OUTSIDE

HOTH + BODY HARVEST + POWER LOADER = LOST PLANET

"MULTI-PLAYER MODES ADD TO THE DEPTH OF LOST PLANET, ALLOWING PLAYERS TO PARTAKE IN INTENSE TEAM BATTLES"
CAPCOM PRESS RELEASE

Mechs are just one of a range of usable vehicles.

BATTLEFIELD 2142

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: Sweden
PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts
DEVELOPER: Digital Illusions
RELEASE: Q4 '06
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: 1 (2-64 Online)

CONCEPT

■ Taking futuristic combat to new heights of realism as the onset of an ice age causes everyone to fight over small patches of dirt.

GUNS, MECHS AND ROCK 'N' ROLL

Newspapers have been sobering reading of late. On any given day, at least one will be forecasting the end of the world through rising tides and new ice ages. If journalists are to be trusted, there's always something about to destroy us, and at the moment it's climate change. Evidently the paedophiles and terrorists have ceased their plans for world domination – they just can't stand this muggy weather.

Now, as if reading the collective mind of the public, EA has announced another instalment of its acclaimed *Battlefield* franchise. Set in the year 2142, the earth is in the ravages of another ice age brought on by centuries of aerosols, Big Mac cartons and general misuse by the human race. The remaining farmable land cannot support the surviving population, and so a vicious territorial war breaks out between the European Union and the newly formed Pan-Asian Coalition. *Battlefield* has slowly been working toward a futuristic setting – starting with *1942*, through *Vietnam* and onto *Modern Combat* – but even so, this must be the most prescient piece of videogame plotting in recent years.

The game is still in its early stages, but Digital Illusions has handled every *Battlefield* game so far, and we can reasonably expect them to continue their impressively high standards. Creating a believable future is a far trickier business than replicating events of the present or past, but the footage we've seen suggests a massive leap forward for the series in terms of imagination – helicopters and flying machines thunder through the air, robot sentries and enormous mechs patrol the ground. Players can choose which side to fight for and will have access to every vehicle – yes, including the mechs – and a range of suitably menacing weapons. Online multi-player will allow up to 64 people to play at once, operating as part of a combat squad, or playing the tactical game, directing your team from behind the lines.

It is a given that shiny machines, flashing lights and EMP grenades don't necessarily make a good game – they are, in fact, constituent parts of some fairly diabolical ones – but *Battlefield 2142* seems to marry an intelligent science-fiction premise with the aesthetic seriousness that has made the *Battlefield* games such a success. It may not have the frenetic absurdity of *Halo*, but it could well emerge as one of the few cerebral, realistic sci-fi shooters, and that really wouldn't be the end of the world. Would it?



■ *Battlefield 2142* combines combat realism with a futuristic landscape.

"THE FOOTAGE WE'VE SEEN SUGGESTS A MASSIVE LEAP FORWARD FOR THE SERIES IN TERMS OF IMAGINATION"



■ Yes, the rumours are true, there will be mechs, and yes, you can have a go.

■ Players will have multiple vehicles and weapons at their disposal.


eMag

CRYSIS



The jungle environments are nothing short of breathtaking, eclipsing anything else we've seen.

THE NEXT GENERATION HAS ALREADY ARRIVED

2006 is a period of transition. Since the so-called 'next generation' arrived with Microsoft's Xbox 360, videogame observers have been constantly looking to the future. This is a medium surrounded by conjecture and hearsay about the types of gaming experiences that are just around the corner. The PS3 is due at the end of the year and will be twice as powerful as a cybernetic Chuck Norris, while the Nintendo Wii may change the way videogames are played for ever… it's easy to forget just what we have right now. Free from the shackles of generations and platforms, the PC scene is set to be ignited once again by tomorrow's 'next big thing' before console gamers have had a chance to get used to today's.

Debuted at this year's Game Developers Conference, *Crysis* is the second project from Coburg's Crytek studio, the brain behind the critically acclaimed *Far Cry*. A tantalisingly brief video trailer has already done enough to demonstrate the inadequacy of the most recent batch of FPS titles because Crysis is a technological monolith. Such 'fascinating' visual tricks as volumetric clouds, real-time ambient maps and soft shadows may not set hearts racing, but when they have a real effect on gameplay – and look beautiful – then we'll stand up and take notice.

As you may have twigged, *Crysis* is a futuristic FPS. Its plotline is typical sub-cinema videogame fare: an asteroid has landed in North Korea, so Kim Jong and his crew claim it as their own. That is, until it bursts open and reveals a 2km-high alien ship. Then, unsurprisingly, they call in the Yanks for help. Cue a *Halo*-type scenario where you save the world from marauding aliens. Not massively exciting, we know, but once again the implications on gameplay are far more important.

The ship has frozen half of North Korea, which has caused a shift in the global climate. This means that *Crysis'* environment is entirely affected by weather – not just aesthetically pleasing rain or snow, but earthquakes, landslides and even tornados that can hit at any time. The landscape is constantly evolving, meaning players will have to alter their strategies in real time dependant on their surroundings.

It's all to do with 'emergent gameplay'. Actions taken within *Crysis*'s amazingly detailed world have genuine consequences, and will affect the game's future. Much in the same way as *Oblivion* remembers who has been killed and the whereabouts of any items that have been dropped, Crytek's title promises a similar level of verisimilitude, meaning no two players will ever have identical experiences. The enemy AI, for example, is supposedly superior to even our own; the aliens are a genuine threat to human safety, and Crytek does not want them to be mere cannon fodder. We envisage a repeat of the first time we were outwitted by an Elite in *Halo*, but on a far grander and more impressive scale.

Far Cry proved that Crytek had the ability to walk straight into the crowded FPS market and bully its way toward the top of the tree. As it stands, the game is light years ahead of anything we've seen. While everyone else catches up to *Halo*, *Far Cry* and *Half-Life*, *Crysis* is not even in the race. Expect this to be a game that is discussed and dissected for years, if not for its successes then at for least the loftiness of its ideals. The trailer ends with the immortal words 'Play it at E3'. We most certainly will.

"EXPECT THIS TO BE A VIDEOGAME THAT IS DISCUSSED AND DISSECTED FOR YEARS"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: Germany
PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts
DEVELOPER: Crytek
RELEASE: TBA
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: 1-32

CONCEPT

The natural evolution of the Cry engine takes us here. An absolutely gorgeous FPS with visuals and effects beyond anything else.

LEAF ENCOUNTER

Just a few short months ago, when Hideo Kojima discussed the possibilities of filling his *MGS4* gameworld with a living eco-structure – including growing plants and shifting tides – it seemed like typical Kojima hyperbole. However, Crytek may have pipped the serpentine one to the post, *Crysis'* environment is constantly evolving, and yes, plants do actually grow. We're yet to see the final implications such a bold claim has on gameplay, but considering a large portion of the game is set in the thick Korean jungle, the word 'interesting' could not be more apt. E3 will surely tell us more, but for the moment let's just say our appetite is well and truly whetted.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Bursting onto the scene in 2004 with the magnificent *Far Cry*, Crytek has continued to stamp its authority on the FPS scene. With the successful outsourcing of *Instincts* on Xbox and the forthcoming *Predator* on 360, and now *Crysis*, the future is looking bright.

HISTORY

■ **FAR CRY** 2004 [PC]

"ENCOUNTER A COMPELLING, FRIGHTENING AND TOTALLY ORIGINAL ALIEN SPECIES THAT USES ITS SENSES INTELLIGENTLY"

ELECTRONIC ARTS, PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

CRY ME A RIVER

FAR CRY + HALO + OBLIVION = CRYSIS

■ Expect there to be a huge amount of vehicles to commandeer throughout the game.

THE DARKNESS



The Darklings are adorable. A bit scary, but adorable.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

EMBRACE THE DARK SIDE

RIDDICK + DIESEL x EVIL = THE DARKNESS

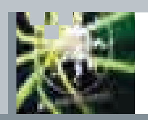
"THE DARKNESS VIDEOGAME IS A DYNAMIC FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER THAT ALLOWS PLAYERS TO CALL UPON THE FORCES OF THE EVIL UNDERWORLD"

CHRISTOPH HARTMANN, 2K GAMES



THE DARKNESS

XBOX 360/MULTIFORMAT



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Originally known as O3 Games, the company started small. After the release of *The Outforce* in 2000, O3 started looking for a challenge; it soon found Starbreeze Studios, and realised that a merger would benefit everyone. So, in 2001 Starbreeze merged into O3, and the resulting package was renamed Starbreeze.

HISTORY

- ■ THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK 2004 [Multi]
- ■ KNIGHTS OF THE TEMPLE 2004 [Multi]
- ■ ENCLAVE 2002 [Multi]



DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360, PlayStation3
ORIGIN: Sweden
PUBLISHER: 2K Games
DEVELOPER: Starbreeze
RELEASE: Q3 '06
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: TBA

CONCEPT

■ Play a comic book 'hero' you may not be familiar with, as you use the powers of the Darkness to rise through the ranks to become mafia boss.

WILL IT CONSUME US ALL?

Videogames have a very strange relationship with comic characters; this is something of which we are all aware. Of late, we've been subject to some horrific offerings but, more often than not, these games are based around comic character movies rather than the comics themselves, thus roping them in on the dreaded movie-licence territory. It's thanks largely to this that a bad name is being quickly earned by our ink-filled friends, and many gamers are likely to groan at the news of yet another that's soon to reach the next-gen consoles.

The Darkness is different though. There is no movie (yet), and it's fair to assume that most won't have heard of the character or the comic. This is a good thing. With no other commercial arm of promotion in the public eye, Starbreeze must be aware that *The Darkness* is going to be sold only on the quality of gameplay and, as it's next gen, the standard of visuals – it's tough, but is likely to mean a better game in the long run, and what we've seen so far looks promising.

This isn't surprising. The Darkness is actually a character that should work in videogame form, and the project is bound to look good considering the style and mood of the comics. Though a bit of explanation is probably in order. To those untrained in the way of comics, The Darkness is actually a not-so-mild-mannered-chap called Jackie Estacado – a mafia hitman. Jackie gains the power of The Darkness on his 21st birthday and finds that he can control various otherworldly minions. He also has a batch of other, more clichéd, super powers. Still unsure? He's a bit like Marvel's Blackheart who featured in *Marvel Vs Capcom 2*, but better. Far better.

Renowned *The Darkness* artist Marc Silvestri has done a fine job of creating the ultimate 'bad-ass' character over the years, but exactly how well the franchise is going to take the transition to videogame is what concerns us. Despite knowing that the character and environments lend themselves well to the game format, it's how well Starbreeze implements the various Darkness abilities that's going to make the difference between hit or flop. Fortunately, the studio has already proven itself in this area; *Chronicles Of Riddick* successfully showed how good a game could be despite being based around a somewhat shaky licence, and The Darkness name is a stronger franchise to be working with.

All that said, a title such as this will need its fair share of bells and whistles if it wants to make an impact. The use of the Dark to 'stalk' enemies, and the generic first-person action approach that some studios seem content with releasing simply won't cut it when dealing with a game that'll be presented alongside an undoubtedly quality PlayStation3 launch line-up. There are going to be some real gems out toward the end of the year, and Starbreeze will have to deliver on every aspect of the game's potential if it doesn't want *The Darkness* to be overlooked.

"HE'S A LITTLE BIT LIKE MARVEL'S BLACKHEART WHO FEATURED IN MARVEL VS CAPCOM 2, ONLY BETTER"

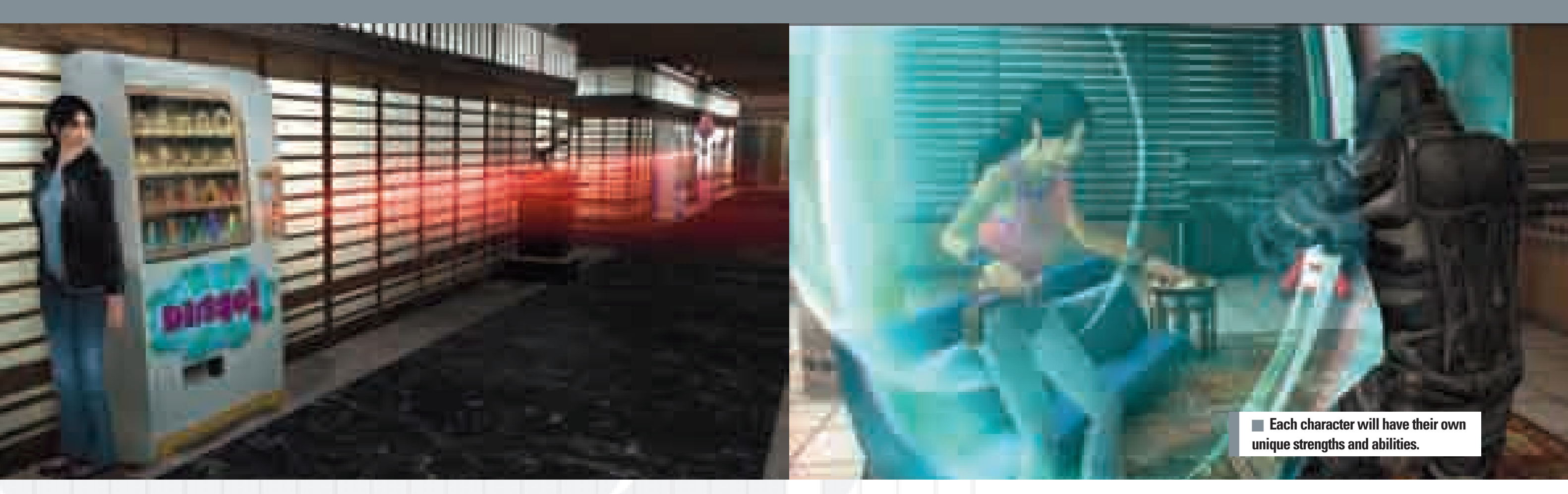
BAD BOYS

Every game needs its quirky elements and anyone who knows of *The Darkness* comic in any form will be well aware of how quirky and just plain great the Darklings are. These small creatures take various forms and are the beings that do much of The Darkness' groundwork for him – and they're also a pretty mischievous bunch. The Darklings will be used in game as variously attributed minions that you can summon to make your life that little bit easier. We expect them to work in a similar way to the Mini-Cons in *Transformers Armada* only far more amusing – and a little darker, of course…



■ Guns and tendrils – the perfect way to fight bad guys…

DREAMFALL: THE LONGEST JOURNEY



Each character will have their own unique strengths and abilities.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, PC
ORIGIN: Norway
PUBLISHER: Empire Interactive
DEVELOPER: Aspyr Media
RELEASE: 12 May (US: Out Now)
GENRE: Third-Person Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

Take one cup of *The Longest Journey*, add a handful of worlds and a teaspoon of RPG. Mix well.

THE 'DIFFICULT' SECOND ALBUM

What is it about film and music that makes follow-ups so difficult?

It's something of a cliché – the 'difficult' second album – but there's a problematic element present that just doesn't seem to exist with games. There are an abundance of franchises that still come up with the goods five or six games down the line, but you could count the truly great cinema sequels on your toes.

Perhaps it's their interactive nature that gets videogames off the hook. After all, if you loved the playing experience the first time round then chances are you'll find fun in the re-tread, even if it isn't all that different – just look at the adoration heaped upon *Halo 2* and you'll see our point. In contrast, film and music are relatively passive experiences, and it takes a whole lot more than simply rehashing the same plot or chord patterns to make you want to sit through another instalment. The main criticism of film sequels is that they are basically the same as the original – only set somewhere else and with different set-pieces – yet this also seems to be the rule by which most game sequels are made, and it does them no harm at all.

This is even more evident when the original is held in high esteem. For example, *Resident Evil 2* and *Halo 2* both chased true classics; they couldn't hope to achieve the same impact, and emerged as mere extensions, albeit excellent ones. *Dreamfall: The Longest Journey* has the ideal opportunity to buck this trend. It's predecessor – also called *The Longest Journey* – was critically adored, yet the sequel displays a confidence and ambition that marks it out as a very different prospect.

The game encourages the kind of multiplicity normally associated with role-playing games. There will be a choice of three different characters to play as, with three separate worlds to explore. Stark, a futuristic version of Earth; Arcadia, a land of fantasy, filled with magical beings and mythical creatures; and The Winter, a place that exists outside of the realms of time and space. The game will also boast several possible endings, bringing extra significance to each choice made, and greatly rewarding repeated play.

These elements may well be crude when compared to straight RPGs like the *Final Fantasy* and *The Elder Scrolls* series, but for *Dreamfall* these are simply adornments, extras to what should be (if *The Longest Journey* is anything to go by) a more visceral experience. So, an RPG with less idling and more scrapping? This could be the perfect solution for all those who just can't face the hundreds of hours required by *Oblivion*.

"A VERY DIFFERENT PROSPECT, DREAMFALL ENCOURAGES THE KIND OF MULTIPLICITY NORMALLY ASSOCIATED WITH RPGS"



The three worlds offer a mix of the abstract, the futuristic and the traditional.


eMag

JUST CAUSE



Although the aim of the game is to liberate settlements from dictatorship, it's likely that more time will be spent just exploring.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

WELCOME TO THE BIG COUNTRY

GRAND THEFT AUTO – TOTAL OVERDOSE + MAGIC PARACHUTES = JUST CAUSE

"OUR OVERALL VISION FOR JUST CAUSE IS TO CREATE A REALISTIC GAME WORLD WHERE PLAYERS CAN UNLEASH THEIR CREATIVITY"

CHRISTOFER SUNDBERG, CO-FOUNDER AVALANCHE STUDIOS



JUST CAUSE
XBOX 360/MULTIFORMAT



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Avalanche Studios was founded in March 2003 and is based in Stockholm, Sweden. It is currently working on a number of unsigned, unannounced projects alongside *Just Cause* which will be its first commercial release when Eidos distributes it later this year. Avalanche is hoping to create games of all genres over the next few years, from action to MMO.

HISTORY

JUST CAUSE IS AVALANCHE'S FIRST PROJECT



DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, Xbox 360, PS2, PC
ORIGIN: Sweden
PUBLISHER: Eidos
DEVELOPER: Avalanche Studios
RELEASE: Autumn (Japan/US: TBA)
GENRE: Action-Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

Giant, giant island game world to play with – think *Total Overdose*, but ten times the size and with parachutes.

JUST DO IT

***Just Cause* is set on an island that is, as Eidos is very fond of quoting, half the size of Jamaica.** That might seem improbable given the similarly grandiose claims made by games that have failed to deliver (Blinx's 'four-dimensional gameplay' springs to mind), but having seen the game we can confirm otherwise. The environment is huge – half an hour's driving, flying or wandering about uncovered only a tiny bit of the massive map. We'd say its scale was on a par with *Oblivion* but, impressively, *Just Cause* will appear on the Xbox and PS2 as well as on the 360.

It's a relatively open-ended, action-centred game along the lines of, dare we say it, *GTA*. Dropped into an island country, CIA agent Rico is tasked with liberating it from its harsh dictator. The island (which reminds us of *Total Overdose*, possibly due to the vaguely Mexican accents) is covered with dirt tracks, and populated by numerous cities and towns – often, you'll come across them accidentally while exploring the vast landscape.

Essentially, the game centres around 'liberation'. By making friends with various guerrilla factions and managing his relationships with drug cartels and other powerful organisations, Rico can ensure he has help when it comes to taking over a city. Liberating towns tends to be a fairly low-key operation – mow down militia, destroy a few things and you're done – whereas liberating an entire city will take weeks of planning and recruiting before it's a viable proposition.

Because the island is so big, vehicles are essential. The player can steal vehicles in the casual manner to which we are accustomed, but there's also a more convenient 'Heavy Drop' feature whereby Rico can simply request a bike, car or fighter jet (later in the game, anyway) from the CIA in order to make a quick getaway or simply get to a destination. The feature was implemented to prevent players having to trek for over half an hour in order to get from one side of a district to the other, but we're still concerned that we'll be spending hours driving around – not exactly our idea of fun.

Thankfully, *Just Cause's* action sequences really are action sequences. In one mission, we dropped from a plane, landed on the roof of a car, booted out the driver and hurled him off a cliff in just a few moments before bailing out as the drug-lord passenger sailed to his doom. You can also leap from car to car, hang onto the wings of planes and perform other vehicle-based stunts at will; it's a mixture of *Pursuit Force* and *GTA*, as trite as that may sound.

When it is released towards the end of the year, *Just Cause* could be a triumphant sandbox game; its lush environment and level of freedom bode well. However, we're still concerned that things will get repetitive (there's sure to be at least 60 hours of mission-based gameplay), and the line between open-endedness and lack of structure is a fine one. So far, though, things look promising – we're hoping to see more of the game next issue.

> "JUST CAUSE COULD BE AN ABSOLUTE TRIUMPH OF A SANDBOX GAME"

FREEFALLING FUN

Integral to *Just Cause's* gameplay and exploration is the lead character's magic CIA parachute which can be opened and closed at will (therein lies the magic). The game begins with Rico freefalling onto the island from a plane, which shows both the vastness of the setting and allows a little experience with the parachute. You can freefall off any cliff or high ground (much like the *San Andreas* parachuting-off-a-giant-building moment, except all the time), and careful deployment will allow you to land on car roofs or even grapple the backs of vehicles, letting you glide along behind them. Arguably more fun, though, is jumping off massive mountains and neglecting entirely to open the parachute before Rico hits the ground.



You won't get to play with this sort of power straight off – you'll start out with dirt bikes.



COMPANY OF HEROES



All of the other screenshots look exactly the same, so we're hoping for more levels like this.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

THE SORROW OF WAR

SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WWII + EMOTION? × SAVING PRIVATE RYAN = COMPANY OF HEROES

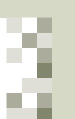
> "EXPERIENCE THE CINEMATIC INTENSITY, COURAGE AND BRAVERY OF THE HEROES THAT DEFINED A GENERATION"
>
> THQ PRESS RELEASE



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Relic Entertainment's goal is modest – to become the best RTS developer in the world. Okay, it's not that modest, but it's on its way to achieving it. Founded in 1997, Relic achieved instant acclaim with *Homeworld*, and *Dawn Of War*'s success put it among the strategy elite.

HISTORY



- DAWN OF WAR 2004 [PC]
- IMPOSSIBLE CREATURES 2002 [PC]
- HOMEWORLD 1999 [PC]





DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: THQ
DEVELOPER: Relic Entertainment
RELEASE: Q3 '06
GENRE: RTS
PLAYERS: 1-8

CONCEPT

■ All the emotion, immediacy and fighting spirit of the real Second World War – well, probably.

NOT VERY QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT

Pyrotechnics are videogames' stock and trade. It's what they do best. When it comes to visceral thrills, many would argue that games have beaten cinema. Perhaps this is the reason for the popularity of war games. After all, why contrive an excuse for a battle when the last century is littered with innumerable skirmishes to drawn on. It's a ready-made narrative that everybody understands.

The trouble with anything based on a real situation is that it shouldn't be treated trivially. The most compelling drama in war comes from the human element. Cinema can capture this individual experience brilliantly; videogames generally can't. *Brothers In Arms* attempted to do so but remained a run-of-the-mill WWII shooter, with a smattering of squad-based combat masquerading as a metaphor for an emotional bond. In a way it's almost unfair to expect a game to convey emotion as effectively as cinema, which has far more freedom to be contemplative, so it's all the more strange when a developer emphasises that it's doing just that.

This is the case with *Company Of Heroes*, an RTS – potentially the least human of all genres. Its developer decried other wartime RTS games as too chilly, too removed from battle and ignorant of the character of the individual men. *Company Of Heroes*, they say, will be closer in spirit to *Saving Private Ryan* and *Band Of Brothers* than to *Command And Conquer*. A fair point and an interesting concept, but how can it be done?

That's difficult to answer, and more so because we've only seen it, not played it, and it's difficult to assess how emotionally involving a game will be without a hands-on test. The level we witnessed suggested that *Company Of Heroes* is indeed a triumph, but not necessarily in the way Relic described. There didn't seem to be a greater sense of character, tragedy or personality than in any other game. What it did have in abundance, though, was physics. If Relic wanted to address the 'static' nature of other games, then it may just have hit the nail on the head.

Having an environment where literally everything is destructible, and coupling it with a real-time physics engine, leaves *Company Of Heroes* with the enviable ability to claim that no two battles play out the same way. Forget trial and error, because once the shooting starts you can do little more than react to the carnage, moment to moment, bullet to bullet, using the terrain around you in ways that simply aren't possible in any other game.

In this way it's reasonable to suggest that, yes, *Company Of Heroes* does bring the player closer to the reality of war, but not in an emotional sense – once again, it's all pyrotechnics; a lot less static, but no less chilly. Emotion comes directly from a sense of humanity, and while developers regularly confuse feelings and firepower, you sometimes wish they would realise and embrace the medium's strengths and not claim to be overcoming its insurmountable weaknesses. *Company Of Heroes* might not draw any tears, but it could also be the most realistic war game ever, and there's no shame in that.

"ONCE THE SHOOTING STARTS YOU CAN DO LITTLE MORE THAN REACT MOMENT TO MOMENT, BULLET TO BULLET"

ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT

Company Of Heroes looks set to offer a combat experience unrivalled in its intensity and unpredictability, and the Multi-Player mode is likely to take that and turn it right up to 11. With up to eight players able to go head-to-head via LAN or the Internet, the game's erratic nature will have the added bonus of human fallibility – a potent cocktail, to be sure. With the ability to manipulate the land and buildings to your own benefit, the multi-player battles will offer an experience that bit closer to the chaos of war. As good a reason as any to upgrade your PC.



■ The developer wants to communicate a sense of unplanned mayhem, not created conflict.

MARVEL: ULTIMATE ALLIANCE



"When you're strange, faces come out of the rain. When you're strange…"

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360, PS3, Xbox, PS2
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Raven Software/ Vicarious Visions
RELEASE: Q4 '06
GENRE: Action/RPG
PLAYERS: 1-4

CONCEPT

Lead your choice of superheroes through 17 locales as you take on Doctor Doom and the newly reformed Masters of Evil.

HEROES OF THE WORLD, UNITE

***Marvel: Ultimate Alliance* is so-named simply because the series outgrew its former moniker, *X-Men: Legends*.** Suddenly, the *X-Men* comics weren't deemed vast enough for an adequate action/role-playing adventure and so it was decided that the title had to become something a little grander. This is hoped to be achieved by introducing many characters from outside of the apparently limiting ranks of the X-Men, and the most obvious result at this time seems to be that using the phrase 'X-Men' in the title would malign the game in a great way. So, now we have *Marvel: Ultimate Alliance*, it's looking to be the same as *X-Men: Legends* but with more characters.

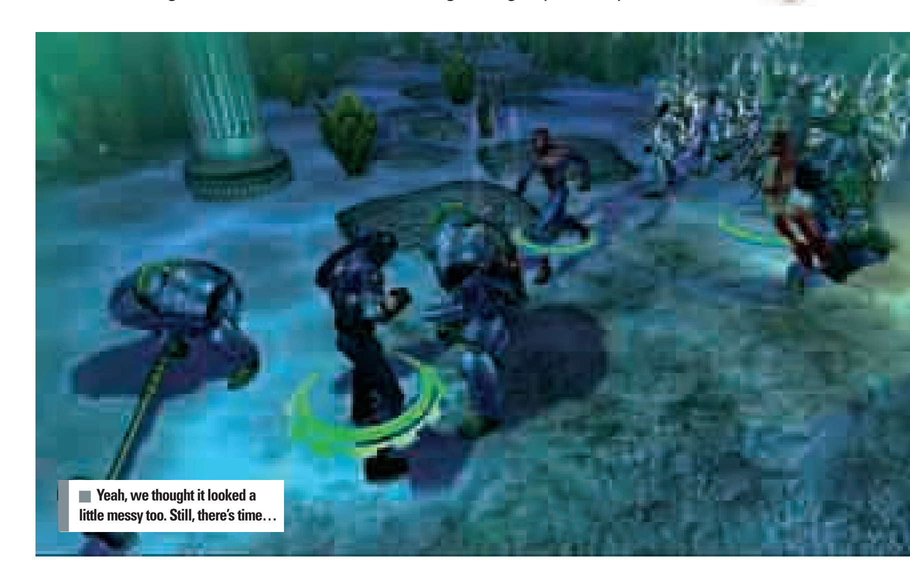
This concerns us a little. At present a full roster of characters is not available, and so this possible impressive aspect is hard to recognise. What is noticeable, however, is how similar the title looks visually to its forerunners. Okay, although progression dictates that a sequel should improve on a tried-and-tested formula to some level, there have been instances where visual bounds haven't been necessary to create a good sequel. With this in mind, the PlayStation2 and Xbox offerings may well have been considered worthy should we have been given a peek of them first.

On the other hand, when the sequel in question is being presented for the first time on a next-generation machine – in the case of our viewing, it was on the 360 – you can't help but expect a bit of flair, something that *Ultimate Alliance* unfortunately has very little of at this point, and something for which there's very little excuse – especially when there's a fair batch of other titles showing exactly what's possible with this new hardware.

Maybe we're wrong to be worried about quality at such an early stage. After all, with the 140 known *Marvel* characters that will be squeezed into the game, there's likely to be an awful lot of content on offer. However, stating that these characters are featured, doesn't necessarily mean that they will all be playable, and although we know that there will be 20 characters available from the start (including Ghost Rider, Spider-Man, Captain America, The Thing and Blade) the exact number of unlockables is a closely guarded secret along with much of the other content.

As we have said, though, there's still plenty of time for this product to be tidied up. The *X-Men: Legends* games were fairly decent titles, and with the additional weight of the *Marvel* universe behind them, there's no reason whatsoever for *Marvel: Ultimate Alliance* not be a credible addition to Activision's ever-growing superhero portfolio.

"USING THE PHRASE 'X-MEN' IN THE TITLE WOULD MALIGN THE GAME IN A GREAT WAY"



Yeah, we thought it looked a little messy too. Still, there's time…


eMag

ALONE IN THE DARK: NEAR DEATH INVESTIGATION



There will be loads to explore in Central Park. Good job too, as this game would suck otherwise.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

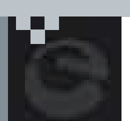
THE FUTURE'S BRIGHT, THE FUTURE'S DARK

CONDEMNED + DEAD RISING x ALONE IN THE DARK 3 = NEAR DEATH INVESTIGATION

> "WE ARE SUPREMELY CONFIDENT THAT EDEN GAMES WILL DELIVER A VISCERAL AND GRIPPING EXPERIENCE"
>
> *CYRIL VOIRON, MARKETING DIRECTOR, ATARI EUROPE*

ALONE IN THE DARK: NEAR DEATH INVESTIGATION

XBOX 360/MULTIFORMAT

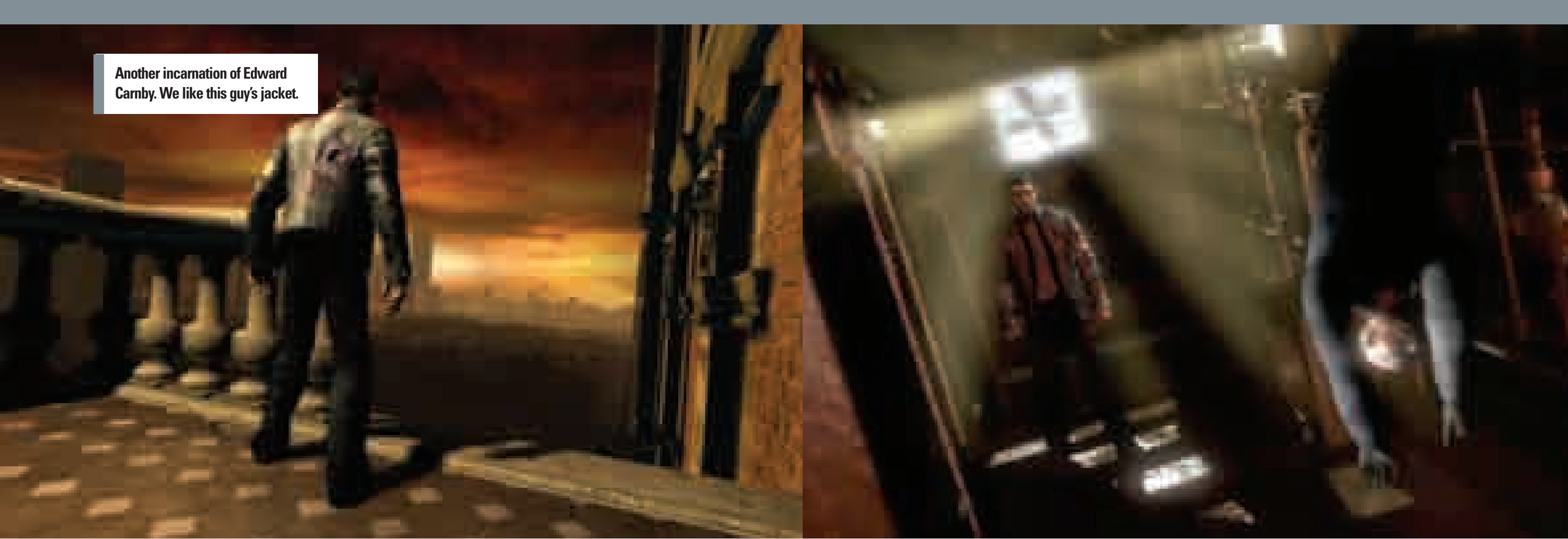


DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Not even a decade old, Eden Games can be forgiven for failing to make an indelible impression on the games market, but that's slowly starting to change with the next gen proving to be a good home for it. With *Test Drive Unlimited* and this title out in a few months, people should soon start paying attention to Eden.

HISTORY

- **TEST DRIVE UNLIMITED** 2006 [Xbox 360]
- **KYA: DARK LINEAGE** 2004 [PS2]
- **V-RALLY 3** 2003 [Multi]



Another incarnation of Edward Carnby. We like this guy's jacket.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360, PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Atari
DEVELOPER: Eden
RELEASE: Autumn
GENRE: Survival-Horror
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT



■ You're a paranormal investigator who… investigates the paranormal. It's exciting because it'll be in hi-res.

YET ANOTHER OLD SERIES GETS A NEXT-GEN MAKEOVER. COOL…

And so the glut of familiar series getting a next-gen revamp continues, this time with the franchise that started the survival-horror genre and ended up a startlingly crap film starring Christian Slater. We're sure that this 360 version will be a turn for the better, though, and not just a case of 'well, it couldn't get any worse'.

Naturally, all genres will benefit from the jump to the next generation, but survival-horror has arguably the most potential. We don't often find ourselves agreeing with Microsoft suits, but we have to concede that Peter Moore, VP of marketing, summed up what we're hoping for when he said, "*Alone In The Dark* will look and play amazing on Xbox 360. The level of environmental interaction and graphical detail achievable on the system is staggering, and will allow Eden to produce a game wholly worthy of the 'next-generation' tag, and provide an intense and voracious gaming experience."

Good interaction with the environment will always be crucial to any decent horror title, and Microsoft's latest and greatest should provide an arena for Eden to really break some boundaries in this department.

The hardest challenge any developers will face when creating a survival-horror is to get the player to believe in the atmosphere, and with a high level of interaction, the feeling of immersion will be that much greater. As well as this, the visual strengths of the platform will make the experience that much more intense, with the tremendously ugly, nearly-as-good-as-they-are-in-the-movies paranormal villains heightening the trepidation around every corner.

While it wouldn't be unlike the series to change tack in terms of gameplay – as the jump from sedate first game to action-packed second showed – and despite *Resi Evil 4*'s success, it seems Eden has stuck to the third-person adventure for the next generation.

Wandering through Central Park for most of the game, you play Edward Carnby (presumably not the one from the Twenties-based first game) who has just witnessed the destruction of New York, leaving nothing intact but the park, complete with its zoo, museums, monuments and sewer system. Presented with a ten-level mission structure, you must work your way around the devilment at work, while trying to save anyone still alive. Interestingly, the player must do all this without an inventory screen as Eden has bravely opted to do away with the tiring mechanic in favour of some total role immersion. To change weapons this time, you have to look inside your jacket and select the appropriate ghoul basher. Of course, the game's physics should also combine well with the promised interactivity, meaning that – á là *Dead Rising* – everything becomes a weapon.

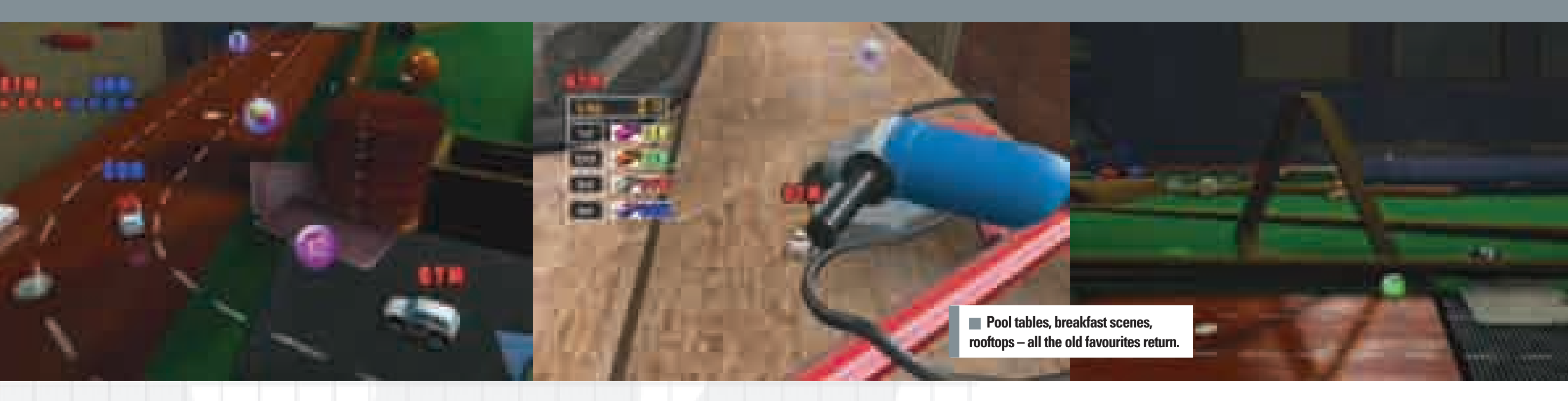
This may be another next-gen regurgitation of an old series, but it looks like Eden has approached it as though it were entirely new, and we're sure we'll be reaping the rewards of such an approach come Autumn.

"YOU HAVE JUST WITNESSED THE DESTRUCTION OF NEW YORK, LEAVING NOTHING INTACT BUT CENTRAL PARK"

ALONE IN THE PARK

We know that it starts with New York being destroyed, and that the game is set in a perfectly replicated Central Park, but little else is known about the story behind *Alone In The Dark: Near Death Investigation.* Why has New York crumbled and left only Central Park? No doubt it will turn out to be something to do with the fact that the park has been rumoured to be haunted for decades, making the game all the more spooky. Or something. It still doesn't explain why, yet again, you play a chap called Edward Carnby. That's the third time in the series that the hero has been called that.

MICRO MACHINES V4



Pool tables, breakfast scenes, rooftops – all the old favourites return.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, PSP, DS, PC
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Codemasters
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Summer
GENRE: Racing
PLAYERS: 1-4

CONCEPT

Yay, *Micro Machines* is back! Except in 3D, again, which will probably upset fanatical purists. Again.

"I WANNA BE A MICRO MAN"

Are you a *Micro Machines* purist? If you are, then the fact that *Micro Machines V4* is a 3D game will probably put you off immediately. Those with a slightly more flexible outlook, though, may well find that *Micro Machines V4* piques their interest – its classically hazardous environments, fast pace, competitiveness and variety actually bode well for the title which is due out sometime this summer.

The game does retain the classic *Micro Machines* feel and structure despite its 3D graphics. Players unlock new miniatures with each success, the courses feature the same inconvenient rolling pins, floating sponges, fugitive Cheerios, and other such hazards to spice up the racing a little. There are now, however, three different modes – one of which is exactly like *Mashed* (remembering that *Mashed* was almost exactly like *Micro Machines* in the first place), dependant on winning a certain number of points in a row. *Mashed* boycotters, though, of which there were quite a number at the time of its release, will be relieved to know that this race structure makes up only a small part of the game. Traditional, frantic three-lap races, single-vehicle checkpoint races and a few oddball challenges play an equal part in the single-player cup tournaments.

It's the multi-player, though, for which *Micro Machines* is most fondly remembered, and thankfully it looks as if *V4* will reinstate the series as a party classic. Insanely competitive and with just the right level of randomness, multi-player races in *V4* are a riot for the majority of the time. In the version we played, though, the difficulty seemed slightly off, with some of the *Mashed*-esque races continuing for upwards of 15 minutes; hardly ideal for a quick-fix party racer. The single-player challenges also seemed to vary wildly in difficulty, making us waver somewhere between frustrated and bored – we can only hope that such discrepancies will be adjusted for the final version.

The only other sticking point that we have with the game is its slightly skittish controls – they're worryingly imprecise at the moment, although the power-ups do help to even things out. There is, however, ample time for fine tuning – *Micro Machines V4* could well turn out to be the best 3D iteration of the series that we could possibly expect.

"INSANELY COMPETITIVE AND WITH JUST THE RIGHT LEVEL OF RANDOMNESS, MULTI-PLAYER RACES IN V4 ARE A RIOT"



There's a *Mashed*-esque quick-start if you're speedy enough to take advantage of it.

Collisions, weapons, fierce competition… just like the good old days.


eMag

CELLFACTOR: COMBAT TRAINING

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360, PC
ORIGIN: US/Colombia
PUBLISHER: TBA
DEVELOPER: Artificial Studios/ Immersion Software
RELEASE: Q4 '07
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: TBA

CONCEPT

CellFactor offers a chance to cause carnage with more than just guns. Anything – literally anything – can be a weapon; from boxes and cars to oil drums and dead bodies.

WE ASSESS THE GRAVITY OF THE SITUATION

There's something irresistable about first-person shooters. It could be the immersive nature of seeing the game through the character's eyes, it could be their suitability to multi-player and online gaming, it could be the gratuitous violence, but from *Doom* and *Quake* to *Half-Life* and *Halo*, a great FPS can capture public imagination like no other genre.

They say that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, and it's no different for videogames. To every classic FPS is born a slew of bastard children, each less inspiring than the last; the evidence is all around you, weighing down the shelves with their mediocrity. So when a game offers something new – be it a compelling novelty or a genuine leap forward – it's reason enough to get excited. These titles don't come around often, and hardcore gamers know to seize them with both hands.

CellFactor could be one such game. Set in the future – aren't they all – you play Dante Alighieri, a career soldier with the same name as a 13th Century Italian poet. After LIMBO Corp – the world's largest military contractor – absconds all of its employees to a remote island fortress, a crack military team is sent to discover the reason for the retreat. When the entire unit fails to report back, the government, in a classic piece of videogame logic, decides to send in one man to finish the job.

Textbook FPS nonsense it may be, but *CellFactor* is pushing the boundaries in a very different way. Just as the genre was once revolutionised by the gradual introduction of mouse control and cinematic storylines, the latest FPS preoccupation is with in-game physics. These days, you're not worth the bullets in your machine gun unless you have a fully interactive environment, but while most games settle for the ability to kick cans and shoot cardboard boxes, *CellFactor* shows up these efforts for the rudimentary beautifications they are.

You see, in *CellFactor*, physics is your weapon. The game isn't due for a year and a half, so the control method is still unclear, but the trailer suggests you have an amazing range of abilities. By dint of telekinesis, or perhaps the ability to manipulate gravity, you can both fly and cause other objects to do the same. Huge concrete blocks are sent crashing into unsuspecting bad guys. Scores of crates and drums are sent scattering, only to be drawn back together in a huge whirlwind. You soar through the sky, peppering a guard with bullets, only to send his dead body sliding off the platform with some invisible force. There are hundreds of objects to play with, leaving you a massive range of possible weapons; the screen's a constant rush of movement, bullets and chaos. It's a dizzying spectacle, and while there are some familiar, *Halo*-ish elements, *CellFactor* looks quite unlike anything else.

Usually, preview footage gives a good impression of how good the finished game will be, but with *CellFactor* it's not so simple. There are many jaw-dropping moments and, in principle, the whole gravity/telekinesis concept is strong. However, whether the on-screen mayhem can be realistically and satisfyingly controlled is another matter. Such bold ambition is likely to be either staggeringly innovative or a bit of a mess, but in the stagnant world of FPSs that's something to be grateful for.

> "THERE ARE LITERALLY HUNDREDS OF OBJECTS TO PLAY WITH, LEAVING YOU WITH A MASSIVE RANGE OF POSSIBLE WEAPONS"

LARGE PORTION OF CHIPS

While Xbox 360 owners will be able to play *CellFactor* right off the bat, PC owners can also enjoy the madness thanks to the AGEIA Physx processor. Specially designed to maximise the possibilities of in-game physics, with one of these, everything from weapon types and weather effects to torn clothes and the leaves on the trees can be manipulated in ways you may never have thought possible. So many next-generation games hang their hats on advanced physics, and if that's the case then the Physx processor could well be the future.



The combination of force-like powers and pyrotechnic muscle is a mouth-watering concept.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Relative newcomers to game development, Artificial Studios and Immersion Software made their reputation producing middleware. Their flagship achievement is the Reality Engine, an advanced physics engine targeted at next-generation software. Their first game together, *Monster Madness*, is currently awaiting a release date.

HISTORY

MONSTER MADNESS 2006 [Multi]

That purple thing doesn't look particularly scary, but we're sure it's very dangerous.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

CAN YOU FEEL THE FORCE?

HALF-LIFE 2 + DANTE ALIGHIERI + THE FORCE = CELLFACTOR

You may think you know destruction, but you haven't seen *CellFactor*.

CONTACT

DETAILS

FORMAT: DS
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Rising Star
DEVELOPER: Grasshopper Manufacture Inc.
RELEASE: Q3 '06
GENRE: Action/RPG
PLAYERS: 1 (TBA Online)

CONCEPT

- Play the go-between, as a professor and young boy called Terry co-operate to collect up the professor's extra-terrestrial power crystals.

IS ANYBODY OUT THERE?

If you want a quirky game then look no further than the Nintendo DS. Since the launch of the dual-screened machine, developers – especially those based in Japan – have been working to exploit the handheld's various attributes and bring us unique titles that hit all the notes necessary to woo the Nintendo fan base.

So how about a game where you play an entity peering into another world? A world where a stylus-prodded professor becomes aware of your presence and requests your help in dealing with his problems? Strange? Too right it is, but it gets stranger still. The nature of the prof's problems are that he's accidentally caused a young boy to become lost and – with the professor busy making tea and looking after his pet dog thing – it's your job to help him out by guiding him around. However, the professor doesn't want to let the boy Terry know of your existence. Sinister.

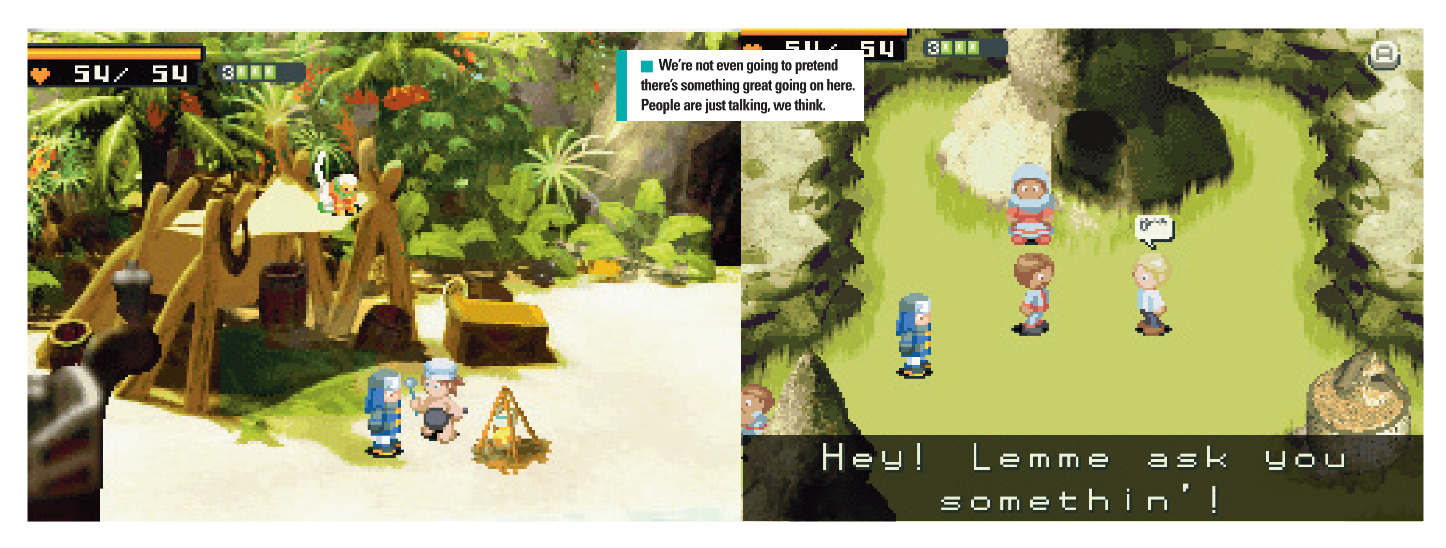
Exactly where this plot goes is uncertain, and we've already been made aware of various rumours regarding the professor's 'evilness', but from what we've played *Contact* is turning out to be a very interesting title. On the surface it may seem a regular RPG adventure, not dissimilar from *A Link To The Past*, but the relationship angle is something that's not really been tackled before – at least not in this way.

> "THE RELATIONSHIP ANGLE IS SOMETHING THAT'S NOT REALLY BEEN TACKLED BEFORE – AT LEAST NOT IN THIS WAY"



The professor watches on from his room as the kid drowns. What a nice guy…

There will also be a number of other appealing features on hand for players to enjoy; ingredient gathering and cooking will provide an adequate distraction, suit collecting adds to your list of abilities, and stat boosting – as is standard for an RPG – is sure to absorb large chunks of your time as you attempt to make your way home to your loving and grief stricken mother. Also, some Wi-Fi adventuring has also been revealed, with teams of lost children working together to escape a separate island prison. Again, details are scarce on how this fits into the plot, but it's all adding up to an intriguing title, and Grasshopper seems to be doing a fine job. However, as we learnt with *Lost In Blue* and *Another Code*, this type of title tends to struggle outside of Japan, and *Contact* could well glide smoothly beneath the radar of most. Time will tell though…



We're not even going to pretend there's something great going on here. People are just talking, we think.


eMag

JOINT TASK FORCE



Reinforcements can be flown in only when you have captured a landing zone.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

FIGHT THE POWER

POLITICAL UNREST + MERCENARIES × COMMANDOS = JOINT TASK FORCE

"NO OTHER STRATEGY GAME IS AS GRITTY OR IMMEDIATE AS JOINT TASK FORCE"

PHILIP W O'NEIL, VIVENDI UNIVERSAL

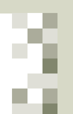


DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Established in 2002, Mithis is a Hungarian developer with a staff of more than 60 people. Although a relative newcomer to the industry, it has already established a solid working relationship with Vivendi Universal, and *Joint Task Force* should steady its reputation as a purveyor of premium quality strategy games.

HISTORY

■ CREATURE CONFLICT: THE CLAN WARS 2005 [PC]





DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: Hungary
PUBLISHER: Vivendi
DEVELOPER: Mithis Entertainment
RELEASE: Q4 '06
GENRE: RTS
PLAYERS: 1-8 (TBC)

CONCEPT

■ In a world governed by corruption and capitalism, have you ever wished you had the power to make it all stop? Well you can't, but now you can pretend.

IT'S THE END OF THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT

Such is the feeling of political dissonance in modern society that it's a small wonder so many cultural products are saturated with a sense of anarchy and discontent. Films, books and music have become a soapbox for artists, and while their messages range from subtle insight to sledgehammer crude, it is still a reflection of Western society's lack of faith in their governments. Videogames seldom take part in such debate; after all, they are designed to provide an experience rather than deliver a message, but *Joint Task Force*'s concept is intriguing in that it does try, albeit superficially, to approach political unrest.

You control the task force of the title – a band of mercenaries brought together to deal with high-risk situations that the government seems incapable of dealing with. Funded by private investors, your team is sent to infamous trouble spots all over the world. The game directly references real-life situations, and offers you the chance to straighten things out. Even your ethics are taken into account – behave correctly and you will be rewarded, kill the innocent and watch your pay-off dramatically reduce.

Due to the game centring on mercenaries there's no resource building – you buy equipment and men before each mission, so conducting your campaign ethically will reward you with greater access to supplies.

As a concept it's certainly strong, but the real lure of *Joint Task Force* lies in the details. The level of care shown is evident in every aspect of the game. Though team size varies, the numbers are generally kept small to allow for a stronger sense of control. The AI looks exceptional with computer-controlled members running, going prone and using weaponry to suit each situation, all without ever needing to receive an order.

Such realistic intelligence works strongly in your favour, and allows you to focus your attention on the exceptionally well thought out environments. Every item, building and vehicle you see can be utilised. Civilian vehicles can be driven to form roadblocks, forcing the advancing enemy into an ambush. Forklift trucks can be used to pile up drums and crates to create patches of cover or barricade your team inside a warehouse. From jungles to cities, mountains to deserts, each setting has its own advantages, dangers, enemies and weapons, each mission has unique elements that must be exploited in order to fulfil your objectives in the best way.

Sometimes it's difficult to communicate what it is about a game that seems unique, and in many respects *Joint Task Force* is just another RTS. However, there's something here that most strategic war titles cannot lay claim to. There is a depth, a level of detail, a commitment to keeping things intimate and realistic. A question, however slight, of the way the world handles its own problems. By the standards of film or literature it could be seen as immature, but for videogames *Joint Task Force* carries an admirable message.

> "THERE IS A DEPTH HERE, A LEVEL OF DETAIL, A COMMITMENT TO KEEPING THINGS INTIMATE AND REALISTIC"

MANY HANDS MAKE GREAT GAMES

As this preview suggests, *Joint Task Force*'s single-player game is mightily impressive, but a strategy game in this day and age needs a multi-player option, and fortunately *JTF* looks set to deliver in that department too. We are told to expect a hectic, eight-player Head-To-Head mode with a staggering array of adjustable parameters. Players can also look forward to a Co-Op mode, which should allow either two or four players to tackle all of the game's missions side by side. Should the level of care shown in single-player be carried through to the multi-player, we can expect something very special indeed.



■ The landscapes boast a fantastic level of detail and interaction.

CIVCITY: ROME

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: 2K Games
DEVELOPER: Firefly Studios/ Firaxis Games
RELEASE: Q3 '06
GENRE: City Builder
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

City builders are possibly the least changed gaming genre, so it can be safely summed up thus: *Civilization* in Rome. Simple.

THEY SAY ROME WASN'T BUILT IN A DAY. TIME TO FIND OUT…

They call it the eternal city, an empire unmatched for a thousand years – unparalleled technological advancement, and a symbol of civilisation and progress at a time when such things were alien notions. Yet despite all of this, the average person can probably attribute their knowledge of the Roman Empire to repeated viewings of *Life Of Brian* and *Gladiator* – larks' tongues, otters' noses, wolf-nipple chips, crucifixion singalongs, incestuous emperors and pissed-off ex-centurions. Sure, they're just myths, embellishments in the name of entertainment, but they're a damn sight more involving than secondary school history ever was. And so they sit, stubbornly in the mind, gleefully resurrected every time the subject of ancient Rome rears its head.

Evidently, Firefly Studios isn't too happy with this state of affairs as it dusts off that hoariest of genres, the city builder, to provide us with a chance to put ourselves at the heart of Rome and build it toward glory while learning about the practices and people of the time. Inspired by the genre-defining *Civilization* series, *CivCity: Rome* has certainly chosen a good jumping-off point, but professes to offer a greater level of immersion than Sid Meier ever could.

With hundreds of buildings to choose from – amphitheatres, the circus maximus, gladiatorial schools, weapons workshops, houses, forts – and over 70 new technologies to develop for the sake of the empire, all the classic city-building elements are present, but in greater numbers than any game previous. Where *Rome* distinguishes itself is through interaction with the city itself; famous characters air their feelings about your progress, and set tasks to help raise your reputation. For the first time, players will actually be able to look inside their buildings and observe day-to-day Roman life. Every stage of gameplay is also complemented by the 'CityPedia', a virtual encyclopaedia on the Roman Empire.

However, despite all of the impressive attention to detail, *Rome* is unlikely to win any new fans. The level of involvement and immersion can be off putting – like being hit over the head with a textbook – and increasing these factors may just be pushing *CivCity: Rome* away from Russell Crowe and toward the classroom. That will undoubtedly be to some people's tastes, but this could be the gaming equivalent of Dire Straits – admirable for a whole host of reasons, but far too Dad-friendly to be truly likable.



The variety of buildings on offer is unprecedented.

"CIVCITY: ROME PROFESSES TO OFFER A GREATER LEVEL OF IMMERSION THAN SID MEIER EVER COULD"



Recreate the thrill and noise of the Colosseum, but with far fewer people.

The game encompasses all elements of Roman life, from civic to agricultural.


eMag

DESTROY ALL HUMANS! 2



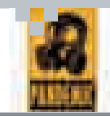
VIDEOGAMES MATHS

REEFER MADNESS

DESTROY ALL HUMANS! + SIZE + HIPPIES = DESTROY ALL HUMANS! 2

■ Something tells us that the sentiment is lost on this fella.

■ Fans can expect even higher levels of wanton destruction.

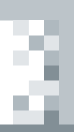


DEVELOPER PROFILE

Few companies have enjoyed the success that Pandemic has over the last two years. With a string of hits including *Star Wars Battlefront II, Mercenaries, Full Spectrum Warrior* and, of course, *Destroy All Humans!*, the firm is one of the industry's key developers right now.

HISTORY

- **FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR** 2004 [Multi]
- **STAR WARS: BATTLEFRONT** 2004 [Multi]
- **ARMY MEN: RTS** 2002 [Multi]



DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2, Xbox
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: THQ
DEVELOPER: Pandemic Studios
RELEASE: Q3 '06
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1-2

CONCEPT

Taking the alien from *Destroy All Humans!* and moving it to an infinitely more interesting decade – the Sixties. Cue hippy-bashing and dodgy cannabis jokes.

ARE THERE ANY HUMANS LEFT TO DESTROY?

Mark Twain called nostalgia, 'mental and moral masturbation'. Now, Twain was a smart man, and he might well be right on the money, but nostalgia can also be a lot of fun – so can masturbation, but if that's what you want to read about you've picked up the wrong magazine.

Destroy All Humans! was a fine example of nostalgia as entertainment. The game didn't look like much on paper, or on screen for that matter, but the whole enterprise was carried off with such verve, wit and a wickedly irreverent sense of style and place that it became difficult to dislike. Despite being limited as a pastiche of B-movies, *Destroy All Humans!* got a lot of mileage out of its Fifties setting – affectionate and funny without ever becoming too obscure.

Most would have dismissed the game as an anomaly but, like the movies it so lovingly imitated, its deserved success made a sequel inevitable. *Destroy All Humans! 2* promises a similar helping of kitsch weirdness with the only major difference being the setting – the Sixties. Successful franchises seldom thrive and grow through minor cosmetic improvements, but the appeal of *Destroy All Humans!* lay in its ability to send up a specific time period and movie genre, and it doesn't take a rocket scientist to deduce that the Sixties contains a veritable goldmine of comedic treasures. Hippies, free love, Kruschev, Kennedy, The Cold War, Cuba, the moon landings; all are present, correct, and ripe for a lampooning.

> "THE SIXTIES CONTAINS A VERITABLE GOLDMINE OF COMEDIC TREASURES"

In terms of style and tone, the preview level we've seen does indeed come across as business as usual. You find yourself in San Francisco, in hot pursuit of a renegade hippy leader named Bongwater, and must bodysnatch an appropriately groovy chick to gain access to a love-in. After gathering knowledge of Bongwater's whereabouts you must defeat an army of crazed acid-heads while Bongwater shoots at you with a psychedelic gun that fires fluorescent flowers to the tune of some tripped-out, Grateful Dead-style rock. It sounds weird because it is weird, but in a good way.

There are several new gameplay features added to the mix. Due to the destruction of the mothership at the climax of *Destroy All Humans!* all missions are now triggered from the ground, resulting in a more open-world environment and allowing for a freer narrative structure. When you meet other characters, you can choose to speak to them in several ways: from a simple response to a joke to a threat of violence. Whether this has any effect on the path of the game is unclear, though it's unlikely it will result in anything more than a few belly laughs. There are several new weapons available to you, including a particularly impressive meteor attack, and your flying saucer has been given greater manoeuvrability.

Fans of the first game may find that *Destroy All Humans! 2* comes across as very familiar, but given the impressive sales that the original revelled in this is likely to be a help rather than a hindrance. Videogame sequels have rarely suffered by giving their audience more of the same, and this seems to push all the buttons that made the first title so much fun, while providing enough spit, polish and fresh ideas to attract new fans and keep the existing ones happy. With any luck the nostalgia kick should merely be the icing on the cake. Mark Twain will be thrilled.

TWO'S COMPANY

Of all the fresh additions to the game, the most intriguing announcement is the Co-Operative mode. Two players will be able to tackle the game simultaneously through split screen, and the game world has been significantly broadened – five expansive environments – to utilise the extra set of legs. Exactly how the gameplay and mission structure will change to accommodate the second player was not made explicit. We were only able to see the Single-Player mode, and details were still rather sketchy, but so long as one can fly the saucer while the other vaporises hippies, we'll be happy.



Now that the mothership is destroyed, all missions are triggered from the ground.

Bodysnatching allows you to take control of drug-addled Sixties youths.

FLATOUT 2





Sub-games offer you the chance to kill yourself in supreme style.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, PS2, PC
ORIGIN: Finland
PUBLISHER: Empire Interactive
DEVELOPER: Bugbear Entertainment
RELEASE: 9 June (US: Q2 '06)
GENRE: Racing
PLAYERS: 1-4 (1-8 Online)

CONCEPT

Take a copy of the *Highway Code*, ignore everything it says, start the engine and drive like a lunatic across a fully destructible track.

HOW MANY COMBAT RACERS DOES ONE WORLD NEED?

Above all else, videogames are primarily about fantasy; pretty much anything can be created and rendered on screen for your pleasure. As a tool for wish fulfilment, the videogame medium has few obvious betters. Perhaps this is what made the blistering *Burnout* games such a success. *Gran Turismo* really was the long-standing giant of realistic racing, but *Burnout* allowed you to turn your vehicle into a weapon, and drive at tremendous speeds while doing unashamedly violent things to any daft brush unlucky enough to get in your way.

This 'extreme racing' approach inevitably gave rise to imitators, some good, some bad, with *FlatOut* falling happily into the former category. While it may never shake off comparisons with its older, more accomplished brother, it provided more than enough thrills for anyone whose appetite for destruction was not satisfied by *Burnout* – and that's actually more people than you'd think.

FlatOut 2, however, attempts to go one better and challenge *Burnout* directly, and its ambition is evident in the abundance of the game's available features. Where the original had only 16 cars, this one has 34. Where *FlatOut* had 34 track variations, *FlatOut 2* has 60. The game has been modded to within an inch of its life – each track has five thousand destructible objects on it, and all the cars have some 40 different impact zones – boasting an unprecedented level of destruction.

Key to this are the mini-games where you can propel yourself through the windshield, scoring points if you hit certain targets. The choice of tasks shows invention, with soccer, baseball, darts, high jump and bowling all available. Enjoying these smaller games, however, depends entirely on how you take to the sight of a lifeless body crashing against concrete.

The preview code that we tested out was not without its shortcomings, the vehicles tend to slip and slide over every surface as though they're on some kind of ice rink, and there are oversights in the track design that can leave your car stuck for far too long. It certainly delivers in terms of mayhem, with debris and explosions aplenty, but there is an overriding feeling that *FlatOut 2* is attempting to defeat the competition by doing the same thing better, rather than developing a specific style all of its own making. Fine for one game, but with *Burnout: Revenge* leaving little doubt as to which franchise is king of the racers, the sequel may be a bridge too far.

"ENJOYING THESE GAMES DEPENDS ON HOW YOU TAKE TO THE SIGHT OF A LIFELESS BODY CRASHING AGAINST CONCRETE"



Crashes and car damage achieve whole new levels of realism.


eMag

TERRA: FORMATIONS

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC, PS3, Xbox 360
ORIGIN: Ireland
PUBLISHER: Star Cave Studios
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: TBA
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: Massively Multi-player

CONCEPT

What do you get when you cross an FPS with an RTS with an RPG? A mess? For *Terra: Formations'* sake, we hope not.

AN RTS, AN RPG AND AN FPS WALK INTO A BAR…

Next-generation technology has left developers with some tricky decisions to make. The new breed of console, along with the increasing popularity of online gaming, has left studios with previously impossible scope and power at their fingertips. How do you harness such power? What do you do with it? These are still the early days, and it will be years before developers realise the true potential of the new consoles, but until they do there is a real chance of using all that brawn simply because it's there.

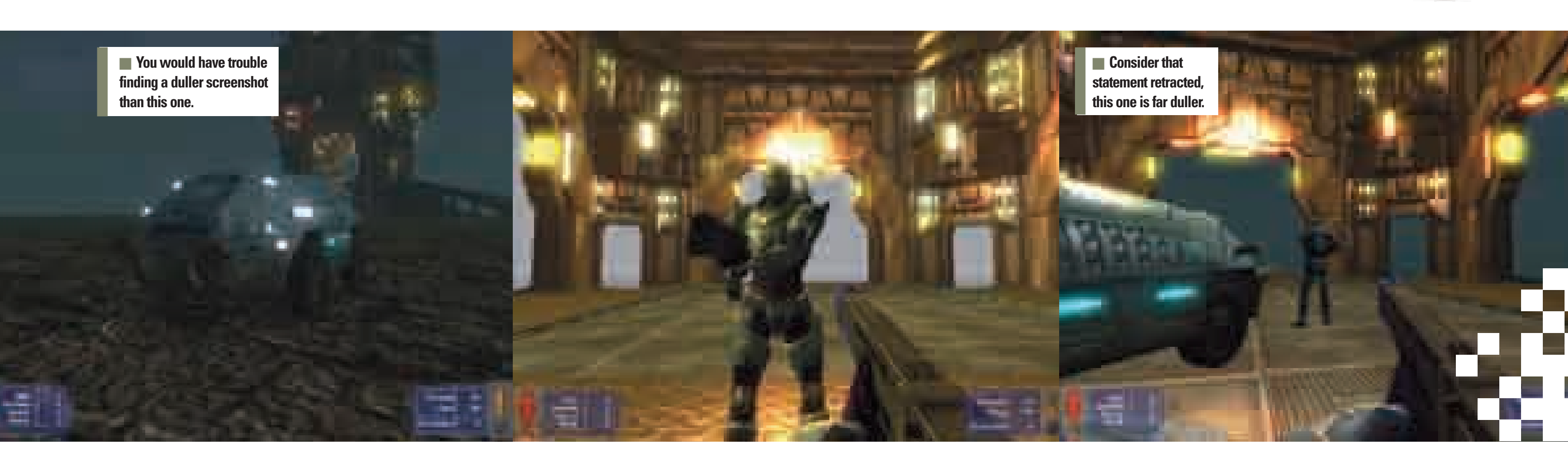
Power is not a necessity for great gaming – just ask the growing legion of retro fans – and despite any gloss and decoration, the majority of great games are that way purely because they nail the simple things. And so to *Terra: Formations*, designed for the next generation and claiming to be a first-person shooter, real-time strategy and role-playing game all rolled into one. Oh, and there's a sprinkling of MMO into the bargain too.

Set in the year 2157, you take on the role of an elite military officer charged with stabilising the environment of Europa, one of Jupiter's moons and a possible new home for the human race in exodus from the depleted resources of planet Earth. The blend of playing styles is achieved through a choice of four character classes: the Soldier faction gives players good, old-fashioned gung-ho heroics, the Engineer is key to the reconstruction of the environment, Researchers explore the new world to develop new technology and tools, while the RTS elements of *Terra: Formations* are brought to the fore in the Commander class.


With few details available, we're not entirely sure who this orange fellow is.

> "ANY GAME THAT TRIES SO HARD TO BE ALL THINGS TO ALL PEOPLE IS IN SERIOUS DANGER OF OVER-EXTENDING ITSELF"

Further details are still very difficult to come by, and what footage there is seems too under-developed for many informed conclusions to be drawn, but the raw materials themselves suggest an admirably ambitious project that could boil down to little more than an unashamed display of braggadocio. Any game that tries so hard to be all things to all people is in serious danger of over-extending itself – of being a triumph or a failure, with little possibility of falling between the two. Still, with two of its three intended platforms either newly arrived or yet to begin production – their respective strengths and weaknesses very much a mystery – a couple of commendably aspirant failures are surely par for the course. This may or may not be one of them, but it should also pave the way for others to get it right.


You would have trouble finding a duller screenshot than this one.

Consider that statement retracted, this one is far duller.


eMag

WORLD IN CONFLICT



World In Conflict promises the kind of immediate action not normally found in an RTS.

STRATEGY TAKES A BACK SEAT

Increasingly advanced technology has raised many issues among gamers. One of the least discussed areas, but potentially the most important, is accessibility. With games becoming bigger, faster and prettier than ever before, people tend to forget that they are also growing in complexity. Take *Oblivion*, for example; a landmark game to be sure, but for anyone not used to the RPG format it is all but impenetrable. Should *Oblivion* now become the standard for RPGs, the genre, always highly selective in its appeal, will become even more abstruse.

Nintendo has recognised this trend – that the next generation will have an isolating rather than a democratising effect on games – and the Nintendo Wii is its response. Real-time strategy games, however, are unlikely to be on Nintendo's agenda. Classically the preserve of PC gamers, RTS titles have always maintained a strong presence on shop shelves, but with every release they sink further into bewildering depth and complexity; the elements that estranged gamers from the genre have only grown more prevalent.

It isn't that forthcoming titles like *Supreme Commander* don't look good, far from it. The visuals are stunning, the realism is unparalleled and the level of control is dizzying. Hardcore strategy fans will no doubt be drooling with anticipation, but RTS virgins are unlikely to choose either title as a starting point. This is where *World In Conflict* comes in. Pitched somewhere between *Command & Conquer* and *Unreal Tournament*, Massive removes the hours of resource collecting and preparation that characterises the genre, and focuses instead on the final five minutes – the combat. Or, to put it in a more hackneyed way, an RTS for the FPS crowd.

When we were shown the game recently there wasn't a Single-Player mode to look at. This wasn't an oversight – single-player will certainly be there in time for release – but more a statement of intent. This could be the first RTS to be designed specifically with pick-up-and-play value in mind, and the developer strongly expects that, like *Counter Strike*, *World In Conflict* will find its true home in online team gaming.

This is a difficult concept, but when in action it makes sense. Players choose a side and take control of one of four regiments: Infantry, Armour, Support or Aerial Forces. Each team starts with the same amount of funds and can buy as much of each regiment as they need. With a variety of environments and up to 16 players taking part in any one battle, the trick with *World In Conflict* will be finding the balance between your team and the environment in order to out-think the enemy.

Visually the game is stunning, with every beautifully rendered tree and building fully destructible, full camera control and an array of weapons and vehicles. Most impressive are the nuclear strikes, which devastate buildings, flatten forests and black out the sun. Even the birds stop singing.

With the developer claiming an average battle length of less than half an hour, and the single-player shrouded in secrecy, the jury's out on whether the 'action RTS' will become a sub-genre or just an anomalous aside. One thing can be said for certain, *World In Conflict* is looking impressive, and even if the concept fails, it will have been an admirable attempt to do something different; a reaction against the snobbery that technology nurtures.

"THE DEVELOPER BELIEVES THIS GAME WILL FIND ITS HOME IN ONLINE TEAM GAMING"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: Sweden
PUBLISHER: Vivendi
DEVELOPER: Massive Entertainment
RELEASE: Q2 '07
GENRE: RTS
PLAYERS: 1 (1-16 Online)

CONCEPT

An RTS for people with short attention spans; taking all of the fun stuff and stretching it out into a whole game.

THE NAME'S BOND...

If you like a sprinkling of fact with your fiction, then *World In Conflict* is the game for you. The story starts in 1989, in a world where the Cold War is still raging, where the Berlin wall never fell and where the USSR just mounted an invasion of America. For maximum realism the developers commissioned Larry Bond to design the concept and help with the story elements. Bond is one of the world's leading Cold War experts and best-selling author of books such as *Red Phoenix*, *Vortex* and *Red Storm Rising*, which he co-wrote with Tom Clancy. Tom Clancy's involvement ensures that, if nothing else, the game should feel authentic.

WORLD IN CONFLICT

PC



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Massive Entertainment established itself quickly. Set up in 1997, it achieved notoriety with its first release, *Ground Control*. The saga now stands at three games – *World In Conflict* should prove that it's just as adept at action as it is strategy.

HISTORY

- GROUND CONTROL 2: OPERATION EXODUS 2004 [PC]
- GROUND CONTROL 2000 [PC]

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

HANDS UP IF YOU HATE STRATEGY

C&C: RED ALERT – BORING BITS x COUNTER STRIKE = WORLD IN CONFLICT

"WORLD IN CONFLICT NARROWS THE GAMEPLAY FOCUS TO THE BEST PART – THE INTENSE ACTION OF MODERN WARFARE"

CINDY COOK, VIVENDI UNIVERSAL

■ Airstrikes are available, but at a premium, so use them wisely.

MOTOGP '06



Up to 20 players can race at one time on Xbox Live.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: THQ
DEVELOPER: Climax
RELEASE: 9 June
GENRE: Racing
PLAYERS: 1-4 (2-20 Online)

CONCEPT

The all-conquering bike franchise returns for another dose of realistic racing, with some shiny next-gen graphics thrown into the mix.

BORN TO BE MILD

Why motorbikes aren't the subject of more videogames is something of a mystery. There is something about the idea of clinging for dear life to a jet engine on two wheels that really gets the imagination going. For the young, motorbikes are the ultimate symbol of cool, of sex, of living life on the edge. As the years wear on, however, and that reckless side is worn away, they come to symbolise death, destruction and senseless risk.

Somewhere in the gulf that lies between these twin stigmas of sex and death is the reality of riding a motorbike, and it is here that *MotoGP '06* makes its home. Not particularly sexy or especially dangerous, just unashamedly honest. Now, there's nothing wrong with that – after all, *MotoGP* is arguably the most respected biking franchise around – but despite the obvious quality of the preview code we've played, such slavish devotion to accurately capturing a motorbike race will certainly limit its appeal.

Despite the shoulder-dislocating speed associated with superbikes, this is one game that's all about braking. The bike isn't robust enough to skid around corners or bounce off opponents, unless you fancy a quick interface with the tarmac, yet the tracks are entirely based around tight turns. There are only ever a couple of straights that allow you to really open up the throttle and let rip, but these moments of freedom are relatively short lived. It's not that there isn't an element of skill or satisfaction to mastering the gameplay, but with such power at your disposal, taking whole sections of the track at a crawl can be frustrating.

Okay, so it is for Xbox 360, and yes the graphics do look lovely, but all of the processing power in the world can't disguise the fact that *MotoGP '06* is a game aimed squarely at existing fans of the series. So much so, in fact, that aside from updated rider and track information, and an inevitable kick up the visual backside, very little seems to have been added.

There is a famous quote from a book review by Abraham Lincoln, it reads, "Those who like this kind of thing will find that this is the kind of thing that they like". The same could be said of *MotoGP '06*. If you want a realistic motorbike game then chances are you already know that this is on the way, and you're unlikely to be disappointed with the results. If you prefer your racing rough, fast and crammed with sex and death then the chances are you haven't owned a motorbike game since *Road Rash*, and *MotoGP '06* isn't actually likely to change that.

"SUCH SLAVISH DEVOTION TO ACCURATELY CAPTURING A MOTORBIKE RACE WILL CERTAINLY LIMIT MOTOGP'S APPEAL"



Did we mention that the graphics are great. This is Xbox 360, after all.


eMag

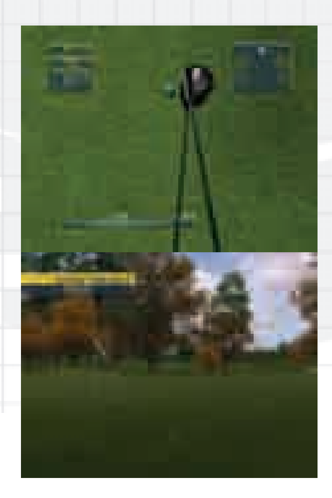
SHOWCASE

MORE THINGS TO WATCH FOR ON THE GAMING HORIZON

WORLD TOUR GOLF

AND… SWING

Format: PC, PS2, PSP, Xbox
Origin: UK
Publisher: Oxygen Interactive
Developer: In-House
Genre: Sports
Players: 1-2



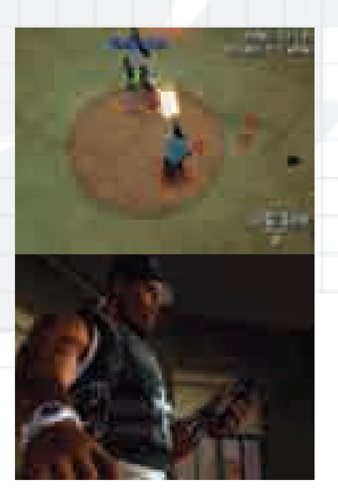
UK publisher Oxygen Interactive for one is sick to the back teeth of the way that golf has always been represented in videogames. Gone are the nuances and the skills inherent in perfecting a real-life golf swing; now it is all just a matter of click, click and click again. *World Tour Golf*, on the other hand, is looking to fix that with a completely dynamic swing system that really is worth taking notice of – using one stick for swing and another for weight placement, the player must use both in order to hit the ball. Foot and tee placement also affect things just as they would in real golf. Realistic AND fun? We'll just have to wait and see, won't we?

RELEASE: AUGUST

50 CENT: BULLETPROOF

HAD ENOUGH FIDDY YET?

Format: PSP, PS2, Xbox
Origin: US
Publisher: Vivendi
Developer: High Voltage/Genuine Games
Genre: Action
Players: 1



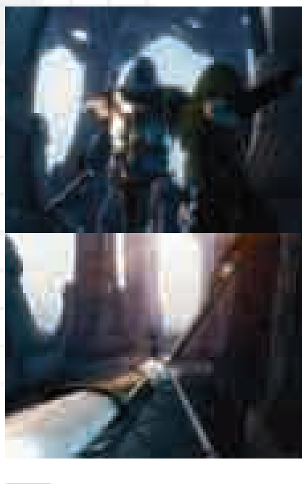
Many will find it hard to become especially excited by almost anything with the name 50 Cent on it. Others, however, can't seem to get enough of Fiddy, which goes a long way to explain the staggering success *50 Cent: Bulletproof* enjoyed on its console release. The PSP version is likely to find a decent enough audience amongst fans and, while Fiddy-haters are unlikely to part with their hard-earned cash, the game looks a hell of a lot more comfortable on the PSP's small screen. With a script by *Sopranos*-writer Terry Winter, and a host of original songs by 50 Cent himself, along with a different viewpoint and tighter controls, this could easily outshine its console counterpart.

RELEASE: TBA

PROJECT OFFSET (WORKING TITLE)

YOU CAN RIDE DRAGONS

Format: PC
Origin: US
Publisher: TBA
Developer: Offset Software
Genre: Fantasy FPS
Players: 1-4



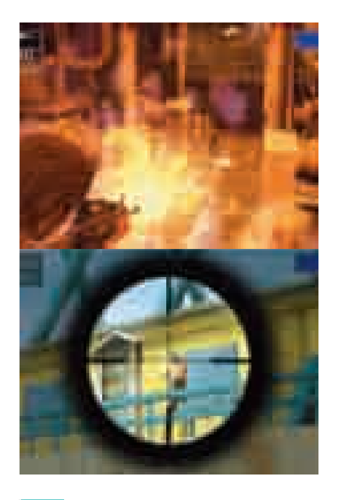
Shown for the first time at the Game Developers Conference and touted as 'the first epic fantasy first-person shooter', *Project Offset* is the working title for Offset Software's debut videogame. The player will come up against the sorts of dragons, orcs and a variety of other fantasy creatures that one would normally expect to find in a fantasy adventure, however, this is far from an ordinary videogame. It seems to be aiming for the sort of ambitiously enormous world, variety and player customisation that *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* recently proved was possible, and its ground-breaking engine makes the game look absolutely beautiful. We will be watching this one extremely closely.

RELEASE: TBA

MIAMI VICE: THE GAME

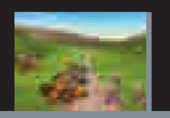
IT CAN'T BE AS BAD AS THE LAST ONE

Format: PSP
Origin: US
Publisher: Sierra Entertainment
Developer: Rebellion
Genre: TPS
Players: 1-2



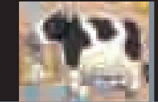
Since the release of the much-reviled PlayStation2 game, the name *Miami Vice* has been mud in videogaming circles. However, now that Michael Mann, the creator of the original series, is releasing a film updating the franchise to modern day Miami, we are blessed with a distinctly different videogame adaptation. Gone are all of the pastel suits and Day-Glo colours, replaced by gritty realism and slam-bang action instead. An early play test has confirmed that this particular *Miami Vice* is shaping up very nicely indeed, with the Wi-Fi Co-Op mode – allowing one person to play as Crockett and the other to take on the role of Tubbs – proving to be the highlight in a satisfyingly involving product.

RELEASE: JULY



DELAYED – Age Of Empires [DS]

Out in America at the beginning of March, the UK release has been pushed back to the middle of August. What's going on?



DELAYED – Harvest Moon [DS]

We get ridiculously excited about *Harvest Moon* games, which makes it all the more upsetting that we won't see an English language version until late summer now.

CRASH! BOOM! BANG!

GETS THE BEST FROM THE DS

Format: DS
Origin: US
Publisher: Sierra Entertainment
Developer: Dimps
Genre: Party
Players: TBA



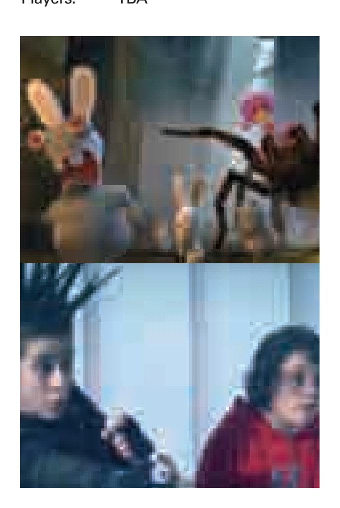
The most exciting thing about the Nintendo DS is its innovative gameplay features – the stylus, the touch screen, the microphone – but few titles have taken advantage of their capabilities beyond what, on the surface, appear to be token additions. *Crash! Boom! Bang!*, however, is different. It is reminiscent of *Ape Academy*, but is set in the *Crash Bandicoot* universe, this game is comprised of 40 mini-games, all of which make use of the stylus or microphone. Wi-Fi users also have the added bonus of being able to send written or voice messages to distract or help out other players, while a very interesting betting system adds that little extra competitive element into the mix.

RELEASE: OCTOBER

RAYMAN

A LIMBLESS REVOLUTION

Format: Wii, PS3, X360
Origin: France
Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: In-House
Genre: Action
Players: TBA





Michel Ancel's latest *Rayman* game may be aimed squarely at children (and rather odd looking ones at that, judging by the above image), the simple fact that that it is one of the very first games to be announced for the Wii automatically qualifies it for discussion. Not much information has been revealed as to exactly how the game will play – swatting maniacal rabbits with the nunchuku controller no doubt – but it's perhaps an indication of the types of games we can expect on Nintendo's new machine.

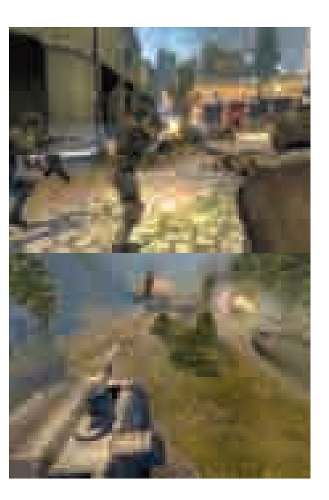
The announcement further cements Ubisoft's stance as the most forthcoming developer of Nintendo Wii software – E3 is likely to reveal even more.

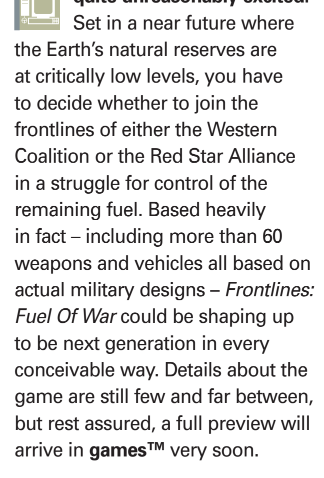
RELEASE: Q4 '06

FRONTLINES: FUEL OF WAR

NEXT-GEN AMMUNITION

Format: PS3, X360, PC
Origin: US
Publisher: THQ
Developer: Kaos Studios
Genre: FPS
Players: 1-32







This title is still in its early stages, but what we have had the privilege of being shown so far has left us quite unreasonably excited. Set in a near future where the Earth's natural reserves are at critically low levels, you have to decide whether to join the frontlines of either the Western Coalition or the Red Star Alliance in a struggle for control of the remaining fuel. Based heavily in fact – including more than 60 weapons and vehicles all based on actual military designs – *Frontlines: Fuel Of War* could be shaping up to be next generation in every conceivable way. Details about the game are still few and far between, but rest assured, a full preview will arrive in **games™** very soon.

RELEASE: 2007

JUICED: ELIMINATOR

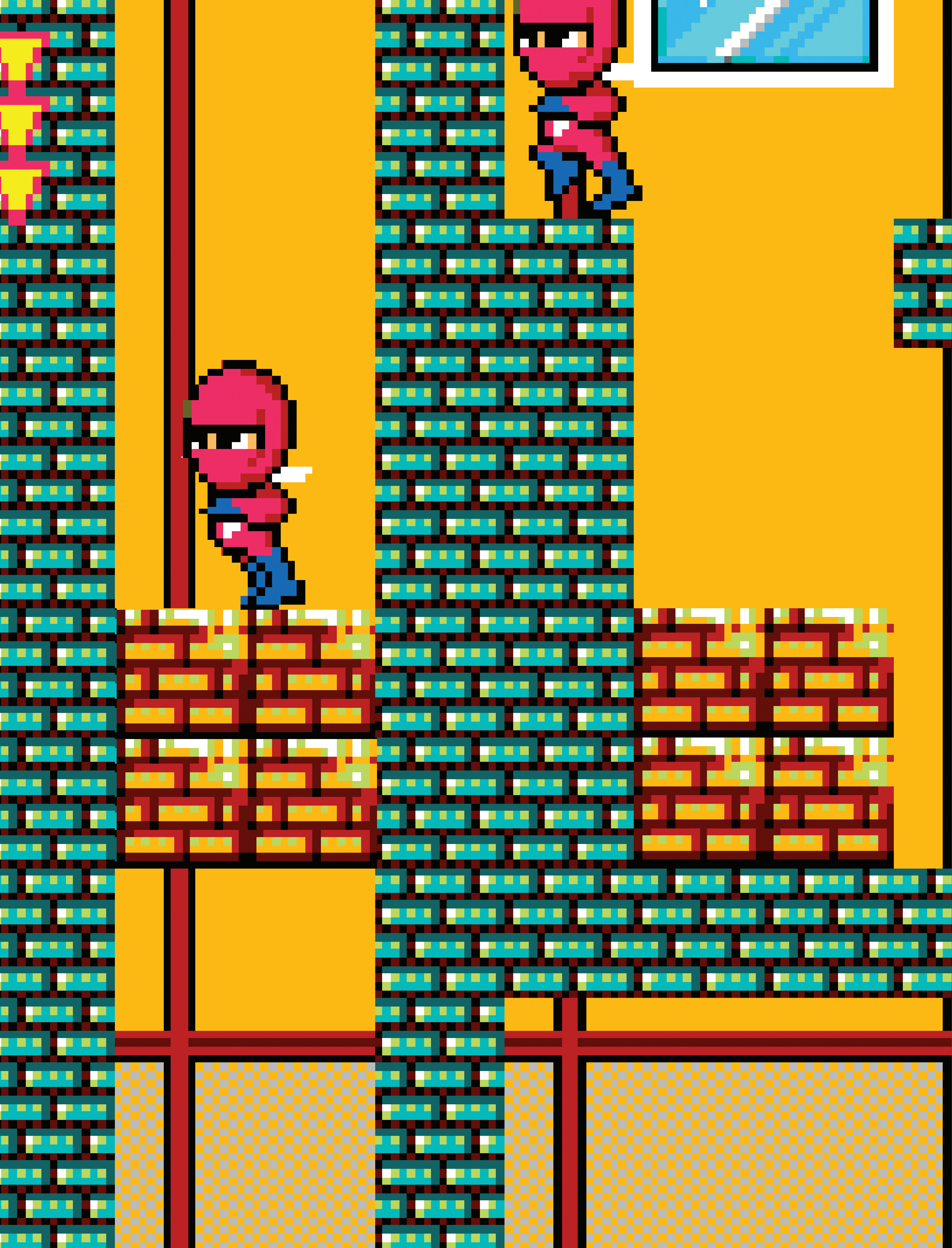
PIMP MY PSP RIDE

Format: PSP
Origin: UK
Publisher: THQ
Developer: Juice Games
Genre: Racing
Players: 1-6



The console release of *Juiced* didn't exactly set the world on fire last year, in fact its reception was pretty average. The thing is, on the console market a new racing videogame can be compared unfavourably to a whole menagerie of other excellent titles. On the PSP, however, its competition is limited to so-so titles such as *Ridge Racer* and the various *Midnight Club* games, and so *Juiced: Eliminator* has the chance to capitalise on the lack of any significant rivals. While the version we played hardly suggested a world beater, the wealth of track and car options – including over 100 body-kit items – could, with a few gameplay tweaks, help this stand up against the competition.

RELEASE: JUNE





A ninja monkey boy? You must be kidding. **Alex Kidd In Shinobi World, SMS [Sega] 1990**


SONY
PLAYSTATION 3



fun for everyone?

In just six months' time Sony is betting the bank on the November launch of its fourth games machine, the PlayStation3. Is the industry ready? Will developers be ready? And most essential of all, is Sony ready?

ps3

technical imperative

Sony has long maintained that its main advantage over Microsoft when it comes to console production has always been its ownership of its machine's manufacture – the various PlayStations are made from mostly Sony-created parts by Sony-paid technicians working in factories across Asia owned by Sony.

Microsoft, on the other hand, has to get external contractors to construct and build the Xbox from its schematics. This was the most problematic part of the Xbox 360 launch, as external vendors battled shortages and manufacturing problems in order to get enough machines available. This advantage is already paying off for Sony who has already started hunting for suppliers for those components – memory chips and the like – that it cannot produce itself.

According to IBM and Toshiba the Cell silicon chips are ready to roll, as are NVIDIA's RSX graphics processors. For the former, Sony's Japanese labs have refined a method with circuitry and semi-conductor experts Synopsys which allows for the PS3 core processor to be manufactured using a smaller and more precise 65 nanometer node (which etches the lines in a circuit that carries electricity) which should make the chip more efficient and less power hungry. The first chips made this way should, as Sony ramps up production, make their way into the first wave of PS3s at the close of 2006.

It may be the smallest of victories, but it's a victory nonetheless – Xbox 360 processors made this way will only start making their way out towards the end of 2007.

"IT IS A BEAST OF A MACHINE; IT'S WIDELY ACKNOWLEDGED THAT, WITH ITS CELL CHIP, THE PS3 IS VASTLY DIFFERENT TO OTHER CONSOLES"



iles of text has been written about the power of the PlayStation3 – much of it months before any actual facts about the console's launch were known. At a high level, Sony's official literature likens the machine to a 'true cyber computer', which the press has elevated to even more stratospheric proportions with vague talk of 'unbelievable power' in one tabloid.

Within the industry, talk hasn't been so focused on aspirations. The Xbox 360 launch disappointed greatly, and some companies hoping to make a PS3 game have grumbled about a lack of materials. Is this picture of the situation – a bubble of hype punctured by a disappointed industry – the truth about the launch of PS3? A peek behind the curtain proves otherwise, after having created the generational games hardware market, Sony won't see its grip on games loosen within the next few years.

Most worries about this Sony launch stem from the fact that it is a beast of a machine; it's widely acknowledged that with its Cell chip the PS3 is vastly different to other consoles. "It's a radical step up," comments one US designer who recently moved from a PS2 project to a PS3 one. "For some hard coders and advanced programmers it's only an incremental move, but for others it's a change which requires more preparation and skill." And in terms of creating games, and keeping creators of games happy, Sony learnt some fairly cruel lessons through the unveiling of the PS2 – lessons that no hardware manufacturer would ever want to repeat again.

Back in 1999, when the PS2 was in the early planning stages, developers expressed an interest in programming games in a more advanced architecture. After four years, they were tired of the PSOne's setup – which many thought had gone as far as it could go – yet Sony's resultant multi-processor design over-reached, proving that ambition and actuality were two different things. The result? Unhappy developers and an underwhelming launch line-up of games.

SECOND CHANCE TO MAKE A FIRST IMPRESSION?

Although Sony moved to remedy the issue – updating the software libraries it provided to aid game construction – this problem indirectly helped Microsoft when it began the offensive for the Xbox a year later, convincing many that its console and its DirectX-based system was easier to make games for. But regardless of however the last generation actually played out, it has been clear for Sony since the start of the century that its next home console would need a smoother debut among developers. It's also worth noting that it was only Microsoft's effective charm offensive last time around that directly forced Sony to buck its ideas up as the generation went on. With money tipped into internal groups like SCEE London Studio's R&D team, SCEA Santa Monica, and the likes of Team Ico, you just needed to look at the development of the EyeToy, *SingStar*, *God Of War* and *Shadow Of The Colossus* to see Sony trying to set a direction for the industry's lead platform and prove that the PS2 could compete with the least-powerful technology.

When Sony confirmed the PS3's existence last year, it talked at length of a variety of features. The RSX graphics chip from NVIDIA, its own Cell processor produced in association with IBM and Toshiba, then-unspecified online power, Blu-ray support, 'Full HD' at 1080p resolution, support for a variety of media… the list goes on. Some developers, however, didn't start seeing kits based on this spec until toward the end of 2005 – up until then most PS3 work, except that done inside Sony itself, was mostly done on PCs mimicking the theoretical specs. Even then the earliest kits were at alpha stage, with unfinished components and missing parts (at the time of writing, developers still haven't seen a Blu-ray disc drive), and a number of studios have told *games™* that until recently they were still without hardware.

At this juncture, this might sound like madness – with mere months until the launch. It would have been even crazier had the PlayStation3 really launched in March as originally planned. But the truth is that when compared to other console launches, Sony is a little ahead of the curve.

In the face of seeing developers go hungry, Sony has reportedly managed to keep them well fed with information, if not hardware. One Canadian programmer had this to say about the current PS3 development situation, "If anyone thinks the PS3 kit roll-out has been slow, to us they're missing the point. Everyone's been talking up the next generation of games, but so few were prepared until lately. With months still to go, when compared to my PS2 experiences, we're doing much better than before".

OUT WITH THE OLD AND IN WITH THE NEW

One of the biggest lessons that Sony and, indeed, the entire games industry across the globe has learnt in this current generation is that the production of games is really a collaborative rather than a closed process.

This is clear when talking about the PlayStation3 in its broadest sense – unlike the PSOne and PS2, the PS3 is based on a variety of common and publicly available APIs that are also used to make games for other formats. It's the logical conclusion of what took place during the PS2/Xbox/GameCube generation, where middleware was born and came into its own, with key engines and solutions removing the drama of coding-from-scratch.

Now, software tools that developers were getting used to in the current generation will be used in the next as well, with a variety of third-party physics and animation technologies available for PS3 development. All in all, these commonly used components are helping make the transition to PS3 much smoother. These include a variety of physics and animation technologies – one of them is Epic Games' Unreal Engine, demonstrations of which at GDC showed an impressive grasp of the hardware.

"This makes it a tremendously exciting platform to work on," says the technical officer at one such tools provider. "The array of complex and amazing techniques combined with the drive for a completely new way of architecting our games is, from my perspective, a much bigger jump than PSOne to PS2."

Sony's almost aggressive move to make sure the PS3 is fully featured and running to schedule was further proved with last year's purchase of SN Systems, a Bristol-based company that specialised in making development software for all formats including Nintendo DS. Now, as part of the PlayStation family, it's one of the guiding lights in the new console's development. Although the team may operate from the south west of England, they're actually steering a hugely powerful console for the whole world.

the new format war

Sony has favoured new formats and media with each generation of hardware, from CD on PlayStation through to DVD and UMD on PS2 and PSP. It's no different on PS3, which is touted as a driver for Blu-ray.

There are, however, some questions hovering over this part of the PlayStation push. UMD has proven an underwhelming offer – as a proprietary format, it's struggled to find its feet as a movie format, and is reportedly being fast abandoned by the major film studios.

Blu-ray's fate isn't so certain, especially with the backing of Warner Bros., Disney, Apple and the like, but certainly there will be more of a battle to push this to both consumers and those in the industry as the lifespan of the PS3 goes on.

Microsoft has already said it will include an HD-DVD add-on for the Xbox 360, and a revision of the console hardware that has the drive included isn't out of the question.

"COMPARED TO THE 360 LAUNCH, IN TERMS OF DEVELOPMENT, SONY HAS BEEN AHEAD OF MICROSOFT IN MANY REGARDS"

And they aren't the only ones. According to other reports, Sony's technology group has been amassing gangs of programmers to refine the inner workings of the PS3. There is a UK team of technicians working on the machine's audio capabilities. There's also a team of online engineers who, in association with the Sony Japan design team and the American Sony Online Entertainment accountants, have been building the worldwide PlayStation Network Platform.

REMEMBER REMEMBER NOVEMBER

Although Sony's confidentiality agreements make it difficult for developers to talk on the record – hence the level of anonymity present in this feature – in the words of one, the progression of PS3 technology over the past months has been "almost overwhelming" when compared to previous generations of its hardware and those of its rivals.

According to one studio, you could actually see Sony laying the foundations for this during the PSP introduction, which saw the first trials of a new art tool (called Collada) shared with the PS3 – meaning that while the portable's actual power can be likened to the PS2, the sophistication of its background technical tools were closer to those for a next-gen machine.

So what does all this mean for the November 2006 PlayStation3 launch? Certainly, Sony has done its homework for those making games for the machine, and we all know how important that is to a good launch. In comparison to the Xbox 360 launch, it seems that in terms of development, Sony has been ahead of Microsoft in many regards – although Microsoft was talking about Xbox 360 with developers ahead of the May 2005 unveiling it shared with the PS3, developers didn't get to see final hardware until July at the earliest, meaning that there were mere months to finalise games, hence the reason why so many releases were ports of games from other formats. (One studio, Ubisoft Montpelier, recently went on record to say that the final months of its 360 *King Kong* production were filled with late nights and long weekends programming.)

All of which is fairly ironic given how Microsoft has attempted to undermine the PlayStation3 at every turn. It launched its next-gen machine earlier with a name that incrementally tried to 'outnumber' the PS3 and amidst much noise about consumer 'choice'. But some say the company has undermined itself as well. The 2004 Game Developers Conference saw Xbox co-creator J Allard unveil XNA, a development platform for the new generation of games – but the software has only just emerged two years later. Which isn't to say that the Xbox 360 isn't easier to program for than the PS3 (*Doom* creator and id Software boss John Carmack has been most emphatic about this, calling Microsoft's console 'the best development environment' he had ever seen), but while Sony strives to keep up the pace, Microsoft is seen to give with one hand – the introduction of Xbox Live Arcade has been a huge benefit to small studios across the globe – but it's also seen as withholding with the other, and given the manufacture and shortage problems Microsoft encountered when it came to launching its machine (see Technical Imperative), that's perhaps another bitter pill to swallow.

THREE TOUGH ACTS TO FOLLOW

"It will be difficult for Sony to disappoint on the level Microsoft did," one publishing executive tells us. "For many people, games overlapped too much with what was available on other formats, and there simply weren't enough machines out there to pick up the slack." In fact, with developers seemingly won over (on the whole) the next battle will be the one waged on the High Street. It's a given that publishers and retailers have high hopes for the PS3 – many have gone on record to say that it's their lead platform for development, and they expect it to help turn around a nasty slump that hit game sales over the past nine or so months.

And the extra half year for games projects won't hurt the launch line up at all. When asked about PS3 launch titles at GDC, Sony Worldwide Studios president Phil Harrison simply said that "enough" would be available – this is customary tight-lipped talk, but given Sony's ambitions to make sure all developers are as up to date as possible via its regular briefings, would it be any surprise to find that Sony is planning a massive assault when it comes to the November roll-out?

"We've had PS3 on the cards for a long time," says a US representative of one of the major game publishers, "and have been expecting it to fairly quickly become our main platform by 2008. So as you can expect, we've got a number of titles planned. Not all will be out from day one, but our in-house teams are relatively well equipped with regards to development material, and we're very optimistic about how the machine will perform at launch."

Perhaps, in this instance, Sony learnt something from the European launches of all its other machines – remember, the PSOne, PS2, and PSP have done nothing but underline Sony's experience of generational launches, and those formats all arrived with better software line ups than those seen in other territories. Although the PSP was delayed in Europe, it actually benefited from this despite the effects of grey importing. Its launch complement was 20 games and, despite lagging slightly behind the DS, Sony had sold over 3 million handhelds in six months.

But hardware will be the final point of umbrage when it comes to the unveiling of the PS3. Having publicly warned that stock shortages will be unavoidable – although not to the extent of the drought seen with 360 – Sony has set itself a challenge, and plans to have 6 million PS3s made and sold within four months of launch. Despite this large figure, the PS3 will undoubtedly be in great demand come November – but few console launches occur with too much stock. From Sony's point of view, if demand outstrips supply then it's done its job – and the PlayStation3 really will have achieved that point of 'unbelievable power' that a year ago seemed like hollow hyperbole.



The Players

MOVIE LICENCES ARE TRICKY ENOUGH WITHOUT THE ADDED PRESSURE OF HAVING TO RESURRECT ONE OF THE MOST ICONIC FILM CHARACTERS EVER. JASON BONE TELLS US HOW HE'S MANAGED TO DO IT AND STILL COME OUT SMILING…

JASON BONE

RADICAL ENTERTAINMENT

Life isn't easy for developers at the moment. With new hardware and new technologies, expectations are extremely high, and many developers we've spoken to of late have been feeling the pressure. Jason Bone, game designer at Radical Entertainment, however, is relatively calm. This is perhaps surprising as he's currently working on a title that ticks nearly every box when it comes to classic developer difficulties; violence, swearing, putting an iconic movie character into a videogame and then changing the ending of a highly acclaimed film – the fans are going to have a field day…

"I have to admit that it's a very difficult thing to do," Bone informs us. "But it's one area that I'm actually very comfortable with. You can always make a game – that's easy – but when you're creating a game about someone or something that people know and love already, if you don't do it right then people are going to start noticing. It's a tricky business, but something that I feel we've been successful in doing right."

For any developer, this should be a fairly pleasant project to be working on. Although there are obvious problems involving the existing fan base and their sky-high expectations, a game based around a movie such as *Scarface* with an '18' certificate must hold very few limitations. "I'm a sucker for mature-rated titles," Bone tells us. "That's where my talent is best used simply because it's my passion. Kids' games are fun and everything, but I'm a grown-up gamer and I like grown-up games. Really, with *Scarface* I'm getting away with an awful lot of things that I probably wouldn't get away with in other games." Although we feel that we possibly shouldn't ask, morbid curiosity takes over and it's necessary to pry into what exactly he's been inserting into the title that's so 'mature'. "Come on," he cries maniacally. "We have two different special animations for left and right testicle. A groin shot is just a groin shot – boring. Full-on testicular destruction? Now that's something else entirely."

It's nice to see a developer so genuinely pleased with his work. Bone is smiling a lot now, so it only seems fair to attempt to shake him up with a few comments regarding how the controversial content that he loves so much is being received nowadays – especially in the US where his studio is based. "The funny thing is, in my opinion, no one really cares," he says quite openly. "Not about swearing, not about violence… Okay, they obviously do in some areas, but if you buy a *Scarface* game, what do you expect?"

It's a good question, and we have the answer. If you're going to develop an open-world videogame featuring women, drugs and guns, people will expect a *GTA* clone. It's a tough business, but with so many 'me-too' titles out there, it's not really surprising that the public is becoming sceptical, and it's falling on the collective shoulders of the developers to ensure that their titles that are set in this mould have something to offer.

So how's Radical approaching the problem? "Ha, I like shitty questions," he smiles, confirming in our minds that the team at Radical has spent many a long hour in a meeting room discussing this very subject. "Well, we're going to invite a bunch of people to the beach, hire a load of bikini models and get everyone drunk on champagne." 'Fair point', we think to ourselves while perusing our pleasant poolside location and wondering how, until now, we'd failed to notice the plane pulling the huge 'The World Is Yours' banner through the sky above. "But seriously," he continues, obviously eager to present a real answer, thus denying us the opportunity to print the word 'bribery' next to his face in any meaningful fashion, "we just want to give people what they'd expect from a *Scarface* game. People are going to make their own comparisons."

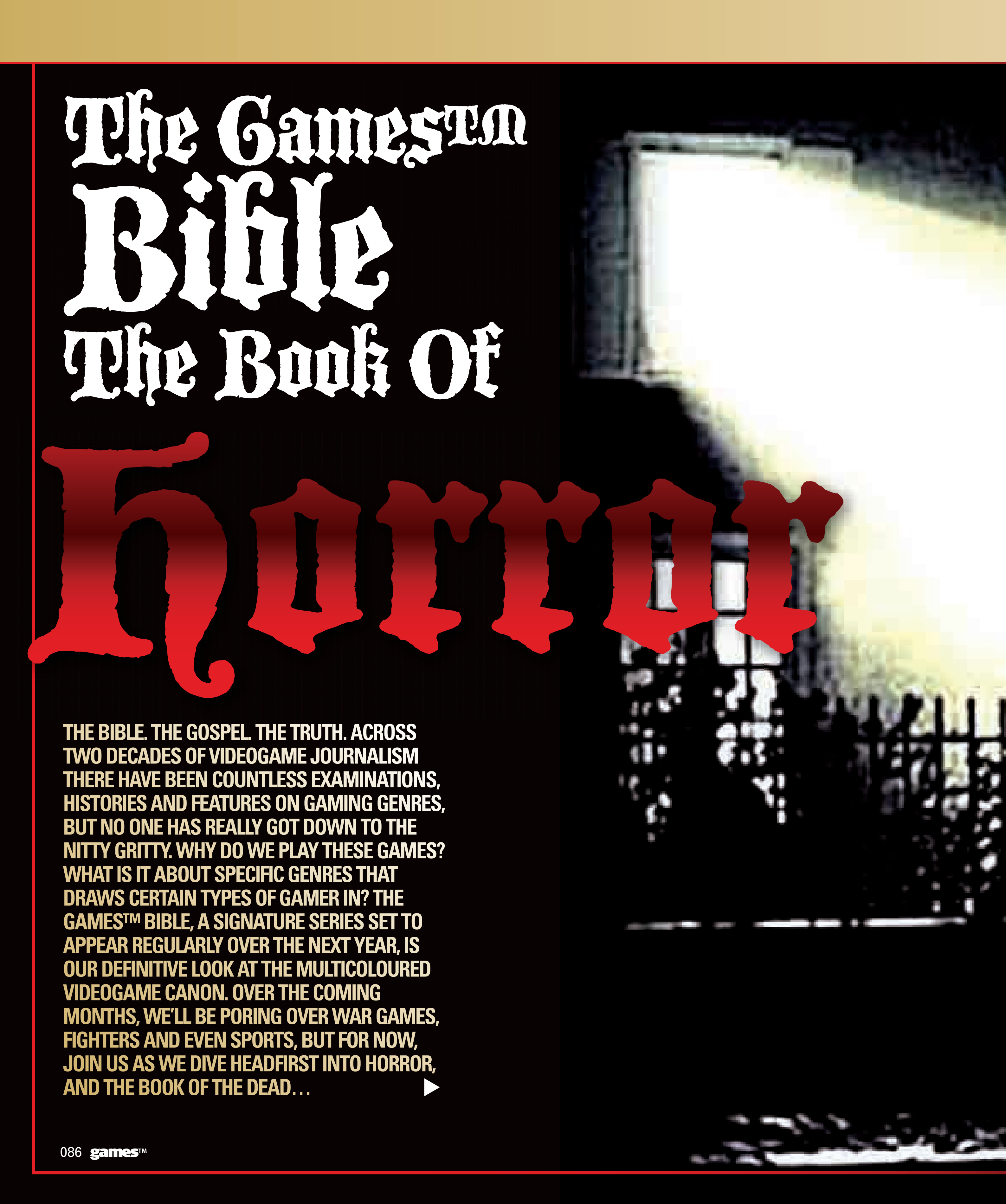
Of course, you were probably reading about *The World Is Yours* about a year ago, and there have been rumours of the delays and re-workings being down to a similar movie-based title that was to be released around the same time. "I don't think it had much to do with the *Godfather* game," he informs us. "It had to do with what we were trying to achieve. As I said before, this is *Scarface* and you really have to do it right. It's a good thing to be able to put a game together, then look at it and think 'hey, we almost did it right'. There were just a few areas that needed a little more improvement, and we knew that. Fortunately, Vivendi could see what was on our mind and gave us the extra time we needed to get things perfect. And we're very thankful."

Scarface: The World Is Yours *is out Q3 '06 on Xbox, PlayStation2 and PC.*



"WE JUST WANT TO GIVE PEOPLE WHAT THEY'D EXPECT FROM A SCARFACE GAME. PEOPLE ARE GOING TO MAKE THEIR OWN COMPARISONS"

JASON BONE



The Games™ Bible The Book Of Horror

THE BIBLE. THE GOSPEL. THE TRUTH. ACROSS TWO DECADES OF VIDEOGAME JOURNALISM THERE HAVE BEEN COUNTLESS EXAMINATIONS, HISTORIES AND FEATURES ON GAMING GENRES, BUT NO ONE HAS REALLY GOT DOWN TO THE NITTY GRITTY. WHY DO WE PLAY THESE GAMES? WHAT IS IT ABOUT SPECIFIC GENRES THAT DRAWS CERTAIN TYPES OF GAMER IN? THE GAMES™ BIBLE, A SIGNATURE SERIES SET TO APPEAR REGULARLY OVER THE NEXT YEAR, IS OUR DEFINITIVE LOOK AT THE MULTICOLOURED VIDEOGAME CANON. OVER THE COMING MONTHS, WE'LL BE PORING OVER WAR GAMES, FIGHTERS AND EVEN SPORTS, BUT FOR NOW, JOIN US AS WE DIVE HEADFIRST INTO HORROR, AND THE BOOK OF THE DEAD…


The games™ Bible

Over the last decade, the horror aesthetic has spread into videogames like a plague. While many point to *Alone In The Dark* as the genre's origin, it's Capcom's seminal *Resident Evil* that really gave birth to the 'survival-horror' genre back in 1996. Since then the subject has exploded, exploring multiple avenues of fear, spanning myriad styles, and leaping recklessly across genres in its unrelenting assault on the senses. Ten years on and it only takes a brief glance at the release schedules today to see how relevant horror in videogaming still is. The fear isn't going anywhere, so it's time to embrace our demons.

> **"GAMERS** TEND TO BE A BIT MORE **PHYSICAL AND VISCERAL** AND WANT TO **FEEL THE RISK AND DANGER** THAT AN **INTERACTIVE EXPERIENCE** PROVIDES"
>
> *CHRISTOPHER SHOWERMAN*

The survival-horror ideology is deeply rooted in cinematic tradition. Looking at the genre's leading lights – *Silent Hill*, *Project Zero* and, of course, *Resident Evil* – it's clear that the directors and producers of these games have a strong affinity for the movies. But as clearly as the aforementioned games reference the cinema of Barker, Lynch, Nakata and Romero, it's the tricks and techniques used to create fear that have really made the transition from film.

A great many videogames, both modern and classic, have adapted the most traditional of horror themes for their own use – the disruption of our own boundaries of trust, comfort and safety. *Space Invaders*, for example, plays with the idea of an alien threat disrupting our lives (a mainstay of Fifties creature feature cinema, and beyond). Move forward to today and games such as *Halo* – itself a thematic extension of *Space Invaders* – or *Half-Life*, and the threat to human safety is still the same.

Survival-horror, though, deals with the specifics of cinematic terror. The genre can effectively be split into two distinct categories: body horror and psychological horror. The former explores the fear of our own flesh; the boundary that it disrupts is our very own mortal frame. *Resident Evil*, *Doom* and even *Mortal Kombat* all deal with this most visceral form of videogame scare. The human body is shown to be entirely fragile. Body horror shows, in the most grotesque and overt manner possible, what happens when an outside threat becomes internal. When Sub Zero tears out his opponent's spine, when a zombie's head erupts in a ball of skull, brain, gore and shotgun shell… it's just not pleasant. It reminds us, on a subconscious level, of our own mortality and our fear of death.

Beautiful examples of the power of body horror are evident in *Resident Evil*, but from a source one may not expect. The moment the player finds the diary of an infected 'resident' is particularly poignant. The diary begins as normal, a mundane telling of that particular day's events, but as the pages are turned it dawns that the author has been infected by



■ *Resident Evil 4* is one of the scariest videogame experiences.

Defining Moments

1. Silent Hill 3

The Mirror Room

Deep into the 'alternate' hospital, an environment characterised by bloodied pulsating walls and sound straight from the depths of hell, Heather happens upon 'the mirror room'. It contains nothing but a basin and a mirror covering the far wall, but while the room is 'clean', the reflection is doused in the same pulsating blood as the corridors. The door locks, and blood begins to seep down the walls in the reflection and, through the plughole of the basin, into the 'real' room. Heather cannot escape, and as the viscous liquid continues to pour into the room, her reflection becomes bloodied, scarred and altogether demonic. Heather moves. Her reflection doesn't. Standing in the mirror is a blood-soaked demon, staring directly into the camera. You can run around all you like, but that reflection isn't going anywhere. Never explained. Never justified. Never anything less than terrifying.



The carpet may be red anyway, but the blood and gore is no less repulsive.

the T-Virus. It details his descent into madness and physical debilitation, and ends with just the gibberish of a mind rotted by illness. As soon as the player finishes reading the prose, the wardrobe crashes open and the now 'zombified' diary writer reveals his broken, dying body. Just as David Cronenberg's *The Fly* is an allegory for terminal illness, so too are *Resident Evil's* more touching moments. No one will deny its overarching B-movie sensibility, but in a game accused of little more than cheap scares, instances such as this linger long in the memory.

IT'S ALL IN YOUR MIND

The second of our two horrific categories is the area games seem to be far more suited to handling. The psychological horror treatment, once the field of Kubrick and Argento, has had its reins taken up by the new masters of Japanese horror, namely Takashi Miike, Takashi Ishi, and the man behind *Ring* and *Dark Water*, Hideo Nakata. It's clear that Japan has become the stomping ground of this particularly unsettling brand of horror, which is also reflected in its games.

While *Resident Evil* is a Japanese game, its roots are entrenched in Americana and the obsession with zombie movies that have been a staple of the American cinematic diet since the Seventies. Also, games such as the *Project Zero* series – Tecmo's terrifying ghost story trilogy – retain a unique Japan-centricity. *Zero* focuses on restless spirits and Shinto rituals, and fits into the same bracket of horror as the endlessly evocative *Ring*. Its story of long-haired, kimono-clad ghosts, young girls, and a camera with supernatural powers echoes the struggle between traditionalism and modernity that is prevalent in Japanese media.

However, whereas *Ring's* videotape is the symbol of technology's evil and its eventual destruction of the human race, *Project Zero's* camera obscura takes the opposite view – the only way to combat the ancient is with the modern. Not really surprising coming from a medium so reliant and entrenched in the progression of technology.

The ghosts of *Project Zero* may provide some shocking moments, but the secret to the game's success, and that of other genre pinnacle *Silent Hill*, is the power of suggestion. These games create an atmosphere of oppression and unbearable tension with their ingenious use of sound and a knowing use of visuals to toy with our expectations. Areas of high tension are punctuated with sudden silence, crescendos build to bursting point yet reveal nothing, video distorts and cracks revealing brief subliminal horrific imagery; its all trickery that's been the staple of the cinema for years, but games have taken film's ball and run with it.

The Iconic Character

PYRAMID HEAD

Silent Hill 2

Cinema has Freddy Kreuger and Jason Vorhees – killers so iconic and recognisable that they can be identified by nothing more than a silhouette or a brief glimpse of their faces. Now it also has Pyramid Head, *Silent Hill 2's* horrifically masochistic stalker. There's a reason the makers of the movie jumped on the chance to plaster their pre-release material with his image: he stands out a mile. He wields an impossibly



large knife or spear and is clothed in a blood-soaked butcher's smock, but Pyramid Head's most distinguishing physical characteristic is, unsurprisingly, the enormous stained metal helmet that covers his head. At first, it seems like pure abstraction, another of *Silent Hill's* bizarre creatures that looks terrifying but contextually makes no sense. Dig a little deeper, though, and Pyramid Head reveals himself as a veritable sea of symbolism and signifiers. *Silent Hill*, itself a 'self-imposed purgatory' for the guilty and repressed, gave birth to this monster as a representation of lead character James' guilt over the death of his crippled wife. Throughout the game, Pyramid Head repeatedly murders the doppelganger of James' wife Maria with his enormous, phallic 'great knife'. It's like Freud 101. In a game drenched in atmosphere and dread, Pyramid's appearances prove almost too much to take. A bit like turning the thermostat up in Hell.

View from the top

THE EXPERTS' OPINIONS

SUBJECT: **GREG McLEAN**
FROM: **Writer/director *Wolf Creek***

games™: Do you think the interactivity of videogames suits horror even better than cinema?
Greg McLean: No, because what games can do, that cinema can't, is capture the intensity of emotion. Heck, *Silent Hill*, the game scared the shit out of me!

g™: Who's the best horror character of all time?
GM: Peter Andre and Jordan, combined. Oops… they're real? Seriously?! Dracula, then. What an incredible character – intelligence, sophistication, and monstrosity wrapped up in one creature of pure evil.

g™: Where do you see the future of the horror genre going, both in cinema and games?
GM: Horror, like any genre, needs constant reinvigoration to survive and remain vital and exciting. I think that games and movies are becoming closer and closer in terms of delivering a great storytelling experience to audiences/players alike. I think the future in genre or in any art form usually lies in the past – it's where most of my inspiration comes from because we've been scared of the same thing – be it in a slightly different form for our times – ever since human beings stood upright.

SUBJECT: **CHRISTOPHER SHOWERMAN**
FROM: **Producer upcoming horror film *Howl*. Actor – *Frankenbabe, Sea Of Fear***

g™: Do you think the interactivity of videogames suits horror even better than cinema?
Christopher Showerman: I believe that in part, there are some subtle differences between these two audiences. Gamers tend to be more physical and visceral and want to feel the risk and danger that an interactive experience provides. Sure, most of them love movies as well, but they would probably forgo opening night at the movies if it meant being first in line at a haunted house.

g™: Who's the best horror character of all time?
CS: President Bush – hands down.

g™: Where do you see the future of the horror genre going, both in cinema and games?
CS: The more realistic and personal the experience, the more scary. I think that game and movie makers alike will move away from total fantasy and toward a setting that includes your current environment. Perhaps games that utilise webcams and movies that can pace themselves based on bio-feedback?

SUBJECT: **PATRICK LUSSIER**
FROM: **Director – Wes Craven's *Dracula 2000, Dracula 2: The Ascension, Dracula 3: The Legacy, White Noise 2, The Prophecy 3: The Ascent***

g™: Do you think the interactivity of videogames suits horror even better than cinema?
Patrick Lussier: Videogames are so interactive… putting you in the role of the character. Capturing that experience hasn't been fully realised yet. What ▷

IT CAN'T HURT ME IF I CAN'T SEE IT

Quite categorically we will argue that the worst (read: best) moments of *Silent Hill* and its sequels eclipse the most horrific scenes cinema has to offer. A controversial view perhaps, but one that we believe is entirely justified. *Silent Hill*'s blend of Lynchian isolation, *Hellraiser*-esque imagery and J-horror sensibility combines to create something truly evil. Nothing has dared be so bleak, hopeless and overwhelming in its narrative and atmosphere; its audio treatment alone is the stuff of nightmares. A truly dislocating industrial noise, the work of Konami's Akira Yamaoka references Argento and Reznor in equal parts, combining a heavy metallic sound with torturous spot effects – the sirens of the original are particularly affecting.

In *Silent Hill*, players become more scared by what they can hear than what can be seen. As has been said, the suggestion of something terrible is far worse than its actuality. Remember the unsettling racket of Danny's tricycle in *The Shining*? Check out the courtyard of *Silent Hill*'s school, and it's monstrous music, or the sound of a galloping horse that accompanies the pitch-black gallows in the third game. In both scenes, no monster is present, but the threat is amplified by uncertainty. It's a trick the *Silent Hill* team is master of, and as technology has improved throughout the series, so the disturbing imagery that accompanies the audio has grown increasingly abominable.

It could even be argued that videogame horror has stepped into the world of the postmodern. The slasher/stalker dynamic (the staple of teen horror such as *Halloween* and *Friday The 13th*) has been mimicked in gaming. *Resident Evil 3*'s Nemesis and *Silent Hill 2*'s effortlessly iconic Pyramid Head play the role of stalker, but their use is so knowing, so aware of the genre's rich history that they immediately become pastiche. Just as *Scream* toys with notions of the slasher genre to create a unique post-modern horror, so too do these games. Pyramid Head, for example, is highly sexualised – a direct contrast to the anti-sex stances of the traditional stalker – the

> **"THE MORE HORROR** REALITY ITSELF PROVIDES **THE MORE EXTREME** THE GENRE WILL BECOME BOTH **IN CINEMA AND GAMES"**
> *PATRICK LUSSIER*



Defining Moments

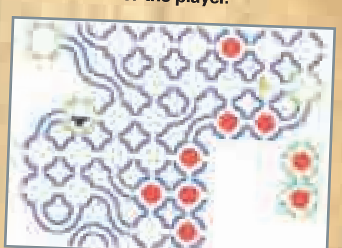
2. Condemned
The House Of The Dead

After a six-hour slog through the rotting depths of urban America, Ethan Thomas reaches the house of the killer he's been hunting all game. An isolated house in the middle of nowhere, the lights are off and there's a stark absence of life. A quick flick of the UV light, and the depths of the killer's insanity become abundantly clear. The walls are covered in the foreign scribbled ramblings of a madman in lines leading to clues around the house. As Thomas follows the trails, the expectation of something horrific builds to intolerable levels. By the time the player descends into the basement, the atmosphere has thickened to the point where the merest of bumps is enough to send pulses racing. A shame, then, that the final level was such a let down; it could have been one of THE great videogame finales. Instead, we shall remember *Condemned*'s penultimate level as possibly the most evil building in gaming history.

Genesis – The Origins Of Horror

Hunt The Wumpus

The title may not inspire terror, but this ancient hide-and-seek game can be traced as the origin of the videogame scare. Players would move around a dodecahedron grid in a hunt for the eponymous Wumpus. Should they think that they've found him, then they fire an arrow into his chamber. Get it wrong, however, and a startled Wumpus means serious trouble for the player.



scene where he appears to rape another of the game's monsters turns the concept of the stalker on its head.

None of these clever cinematic references or genre manipulations would matter if the games failed in their raison d'être: to scare the living crap out of the player. All the film technique in the world isn't enough to explain how and why survival-horror gaming has proved to be the horror connoisseur's medium of choice. The secret to its success can be attributed to one key factor: interactivity.

PUT YOURSELF IN THEIR SHOES

While videogames may never actually be able to carry off melodrama or romance with the flair and dignity of cinema, when it comes to action and horror, they're already light years ahead. By placing you, the player, in direct control of the protagonist, the horror experience is made far more personal. Instead of empathising with an on-screen hero or heroine, we ourselves are yearning for empathy; we are the ones in mortal danger.

As has been discussed, the horror genre works by breaking through the audience's boundaries of safety and comfort. In videogames, the boundary is control. As gamers, we're used to having total control over proceedings; it's part and parcel of the experience. Survival-horror, though, tears through this comfort zone and wrenches control away from the player. Titles such as *Resident Evil*, *Silent Hill* and *Forbidden Siren* do this by imposing limiting mechanics – the cumbersome player movement in *Resident Evil* has even been translated (in an altered state) to the sublime fourth iteration. Also, by limiting ammunition, access to health and field of vision, the player never feels like he or she can walk on with confidence. It's a technique that is entirely unique to games, and specific to the genre. Imagine how different *Resident Evil's* atmosphere would be if it had the freedom of movement of an FPS and a limitless supply of ammo.

These techniques are already becoming dated, though. After all, survival horror is a decade old, and players are tiring of being encumbered by unresponsive controls and everyman heroes. Thankfully, developers are looking to stretch the survival-horror aesthetic and push it in new directions. Silicon Knights' much-lauded GameCube

■ The first-person perspective of *Condemned* only adds to the game's truly terrifying tension.

Off The Beaten Track

LEFTFIELD TERROR

Silent Hill **and** ***Resident Evil*** **may take all the plaudits, and rightly so, but there's plenty more out there for gamers who like their action tinged with terror. The thoroughly entertaining** ***Obscure,*** **for example, takes on the teen slasher model with a knowing eye and a skilful hand. Well worth taking a look at.**

Capcom's ***Clock Tower 3*** **and** ***Haunting Ground*** **offer a more passive approach to horror than** ***Resi,*** **and in doing so have won over fans desperate for their next scare fix. Midway's underrated** ***The Suffering*** **also throws many familiar horror signifiers into its overtly brutal third/first-person mix.**

Of course, any real horror connoisseur should never be too far away from a Dreamcast and a copy of ***Illbleed.*** **What other game promises to make you "shit yourself with fear" at its trailer? We didn't, by the way.**



View from the top cont...

video games do best, *Resident Evil* etc, they do best as games. The stories and worlds of those games can be translated very skilfully to film, but capturing that 'first-person' dread has yet to be done.

g™: Who's the best horror character of all time?
PL: There's so many fantastic horrific characters throughout cinema. Norman Bates would have to be right up there. Regan from *The Exorcist*. Damian from the original *Omen* film. Michael Myers gave us the first really iconic horror killer/slasher but there's too many to narrow it down to one. Chris Walken in *Sleepy Hollow* – that's a fantastic horror character. Given that… Shaun, from *Shaun Of The Dead*. Best horror character of all time!

g™: Where do you see the future of the horror genre going, both in cinema and games?
PL: Horror seems to be shaped by the world we live in, it reflects what scares us 'out there' and shows it to us in a way that's 'safe.' The more horror reality itself provides the more extreme the genre will become both in cinema and games (and games can always get away with more than cinema).

SUBJECT: **ETHAN DETTENMAIER**
FROM: **Writer/director 2006's most anticipated new horror film, *Sin-Jin Smyth*.**

g™: Do you think the interactivity of videogames suits horror even better than cinema?
Ethan Dettenmaier: Let's not disrespect the industry – horror 'is' cinema! But I think the interactivity suits people in general. I think people like being in the thick of a virtual situation.

g™: Who's the best horror character of all time?
ED: Carpenter/Bottin's version of *The Thing* – a mean, unapologetic monster that wants to take the world to hell… take that, sucka!

g™: Where do you see the future of the horror genre going, both in cinema and games?
ED: I hope they both continue to improve. From a tech standpoint they will get better, but we need to continue to recruit creative engineers and story designers in order to really advance.

SUBJECT: **GREG NICETERO**
FROM: **Special make-up effects supervisor – *Hostel, Sin City, Kill Bill***

g™: Do you think the interactivity of videogames suits horror even better than cinema?
Greg Nicetero: Absolutely… there seem to be boundaries that videogames cross that films don't… setting up mood, gore, etc.

g™: Who's the best horror character of all?
GN: Tough one… Frankenstein is the first to pop into my head.

g™: Where do you see the future of the horror genre going, both in cinema and games?
GN: Horror films and video continue to be the "cash cows" that they are. It's all about money, and if this genre continues to make money, people will continue to make horror-related merchandise… and it doesn't look like it is slowing down any time soon with *Silent Hill* opening at number one. And just look at the profits for *Hostel* and *The Hills Have Eyes*.

title, *Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem*, has given us a glimpse of the future. Playing directly with the medium, attacks the barrier between the real world and the videogame.

Hardened survival-horror players may have become desensitised to all of *Silent Hill* and *Project Zero's* vile tricks and crushing atmosphere, but *Eternal Darkness* has them questioning their own sanity. Muting the television's volume or threatening the deletion of a memory card, it's postmodernism in its purest videogame form, created by Kojima in the *Metal Gear* games (Psycho Mantis, anyone) and fine-tuned for horror.

made many Japanese horror maestros stand up and take notice.

As technology constantly improving, the horror can only get more disturbing. We await a new *Alone In The Dark* title on 360 that promises (don't they all?) to take survival-horror in a new direction, while the potential for the fifth iterations of *Resident Evil* and *Silent Hill* is almost limitless. *Condemned* has shown what the advanced texturing and audio capabilities of the Xbox 360 can add to a horror experience. One can only imagine where the free-wielding controller of the Nintendo Wii, and the raw grunt of the PS3 can take the genre.

> "THERE ARE **BOUNDARIES** THAT **VIDEOGAMES** CROSS THAT **FILMS** JUST **DON'T"**
> *GREG NICETERO*

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?
As videogame horror continues to progress, we are seeing it spanning styles and crossing to other genre types, as well as incorporating stylistic attributes from other genres. *RE4*'s strong action ties are an indication of where Capcom sees horror going in the future, whereas Monolith's twin towers of *Condemned* and *F.E.A.R.* are using the first-person perspective as a tool for creating tension. Limiting the player's view while maintaining the use of modern audio/visual techniques has proven a heady concoction, and one that's undoubtedly

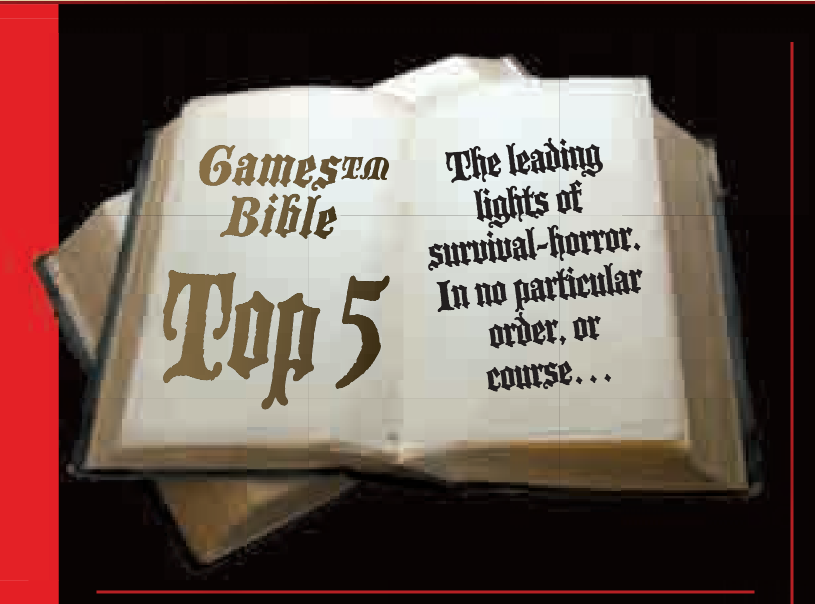
Videogame horror is the most artistically mature and accomplished genre. As cinema trudges on with teenagers, exorcisms and predictability, the stars of gaming terror are pushing forward as Lynch and Cronenburg did 20 years ago. Survival-horror was born out of heavy cribbing from the movies, but ten years on the tables have turned. *Stay Alive*, the risible *Resident Evil* movies and, of course, *Silent Hill* – for better or worse, games have had a huge impact on horror cinema. If it means both mediums continue to strive toward the 'perfect scare', then long may it continue.

Defining Moments

3. Resident Evil 2

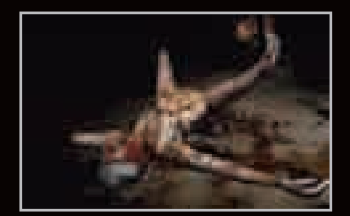
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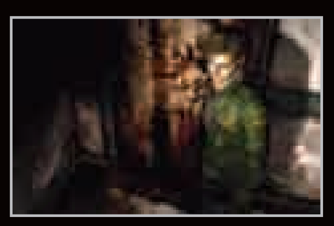
A classic piece of foreshadowing – the first appearance of *Resident Evil 2*'s vile Licker is preceded by a brief preview through a distant window. After a slog through Raccoon City's zombie-infested streets, Leon reaches the police station. A respite, you may think. Well it is, until the aforementioned flash of movement past a distant window. Already, the player's hairs are standing on end. Into the corridor, and a terrible dripping sound gets louder and louder. We don't know what is waiting for us around the next bend, but by this point it's pretty clear that it is NOT nice. And so, Leon turns the corner, looks up, and there it is: a gruesome mixture of *Hellraiser* and *Geiger's* drooling Alien. Its long, lashing tongue would have given Freud a field day. It drops to the floor, eyes firmly fixed on poor Mr Kennedy, and *Resident Evil 2* REALLY begins.



Silent Hill 2

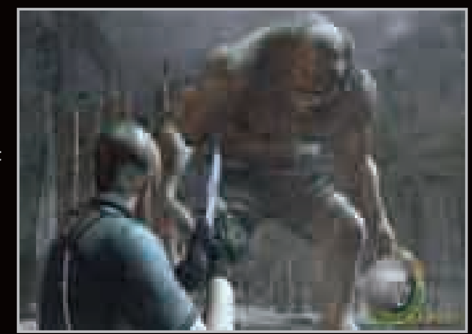
What more can be said about this? The most thematically mature, intelligent and downright disturbing videogame ever created. *SH3* might out-shock it, but nothing comes close to *Silent Hill 2*'s morbid exploration of the mind of a guilt-ridden murderer. Loaded with symbolism, drenched in fear, and backed up by an audiovisual treatment that remains as impressive now as it did back in 2001. No game, previously or since, has dared be so bleak, so oppressive and so utterly devoid of hope. Nothing can prepare you for THAT twist at the end. Exhilarating.





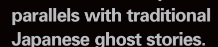
Resident Evil 4

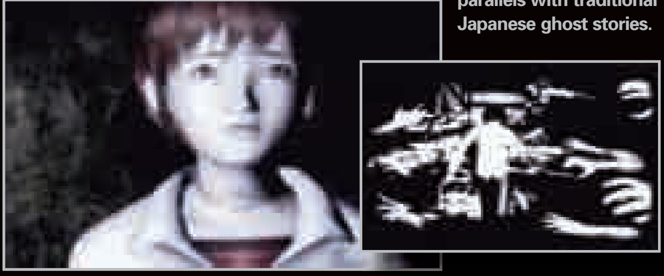
Some were sceptical when news filtered through about *Resident Evil*'s new action-orientated approach, but the doubters were silenced as soon as the game hit shelves. Constantly thrilling, tremendously claustrophobic, and filled with more set pieces than most entire franchises could only dream of, *Resi*'s fourth outing was perhaps THE game of 2005, out of any genre. Its impact on the survival-horror mould is still to be fully realised, but expect a glut of fast-paced copycat games over the coming months and years.



Project Zero

The purest J-horror in game form, Tecmo's original *Project Zero* is cited by many as the 'scariest game of all time'. In a house of restless spirits, a girl named Miku must use a camera to solve the mystery of her missing brother. Taking its visual cues from the likes of *Ring*, *Project Zero* places atmosphere and dread above all else. It's tale of ritual sacrifice and Shinto draws many parallels with traditional Japanese ghost stories.

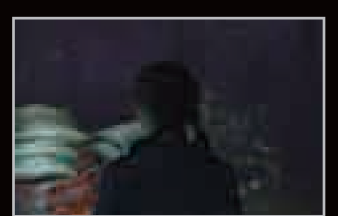




Forbidden Siren

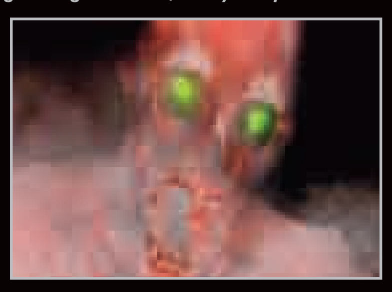
Sony's completely unique approach to survival-horror won over many plaudits when it was released in 2003, and to this day no other game has managed to ape its unique take on terror. Again firmly entrenched in Japanese folklore, *Forbidden Siren*'s hook is the fact that combat and confrontation is actively discouraged. Instead, players must 'SightJack' into the point of view of the Shibito (the game's undead) to gauge a route through the danger. Seeing yourself through the eyes of a shuffling, gurgling zombie is truly horrifying. The sequel looks set to offer more of the same. A must for genre fans.





Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem

One of the GameCube's forgotten gems, this HP Lovecraft-inspired tale of madness and mystery uses ingenious post-modern tricks to produce a fresh brand of horror. Instead of attacking the in-game avatar, *Sanity's Requiem* attacks the player itself. Just as *Metal Gear* broke through the 'fourth wall' during the Psycho Mantis battle, *Eternal Darkness'* disruption of the normality of videogame convention caused as much distress as any monster. With voice acting and plotting of the highest order, *Sanity's Requiem* remains one of survival-horror's finest moments.



DIGITAL COWBOY

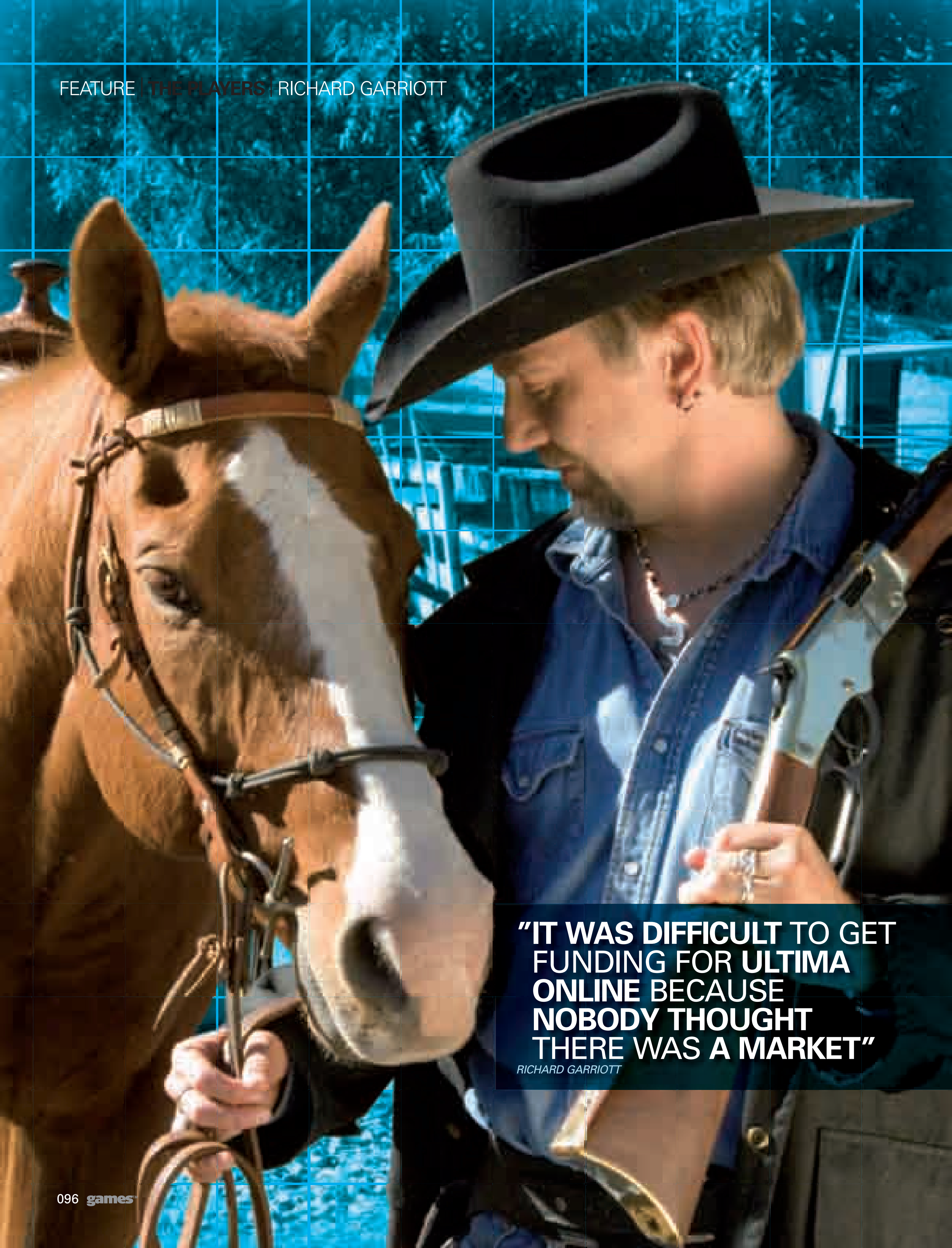
THERE ARE PEOPLE IN THIS INDUSTRY WHO HAVE ACHIEVED GREAT THINGS. SOME HAVE LAUNCHED ENTIRE GENRES, SOME HAVE OPENED UP GAMING TO NEW AUDIENCES, BUT ONLY ONE MAN HAS DONE BOTH WHILE WEARING MEDIEVAL CLOTHING AND BUILDING HAUNTED HOUSES. GAMES™ VISITS THE LEGENDARY RICHARD GARRIOTT ON HIS RANCH TO FIND OUT HOW IT'S DONE…



Of the many people we've interviewed, there have been only a handful that really stick in our memory – we get the feeling that Richard Garriott may be a new addition. Maybe it's because he's been one of the most influential people in development over the last 25 years, maybe it's because he's one of the few that have been admitted into the Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences' hall of fame, maybe it's because he's largely responsible for the MMORPG boom that we're currently experiencing… Then again, maybe it's because he reared up on a horse for a photo shoot and admitted to building numerous haunted houses.

Whatever the case, he agreed to have a chat with us about all things MMO, and where better to chat than at his very own ranch in Austin, Texas? It's blisteringly hot, and pretty dusty, but there's not a tumbleweed in sight. Oh, and the man's got a shotgun…





"IT WAS DIFFICULT TO GET FUNDING FOR **ULTIMA ONLINE** BECAUSE **NOBODY THOUGHT** THERE WAS **A MARKET"**

RICHARD GARRIOTT



ow, this is a nice place you have here and we're big fans of your horse. How many animals do you actually have around here?

Richard Garriott: Well, personally, zero, but my sister runs a stable here and she has a fair few horses. Three or four are her own personal ones, but family and friends tend to keep their horses here as well, and she looks after them.

gamesTM: Fair enough. You do seem to have an awful lot of space though…

RG: Yeah, I do have a large chunk of property here – about 70 acres – so I do have the ability to keep animals if I want. It would be suitable.

gTM: We guess it would. So what do you do here? Actually, we read on the Internet that you build haunted houses. We really want that to be true, is it?

RG: Well I haven't done one for a few years now; I stopped building them when I started working on my new home. The haunted houses that I do are very large scale and far more unique than the ones you've seen elsewhere. If you think about most people who put on haunted houses, they do it for profit or some other business reason and so their goal is to shove through as many people as possible. Also, they tend to only be a sequence of darkened rooms that contain a few 'boo' scares. The kind of thing that I do, well, first of all I do it for free and I spend an outrageous amount of money on it. I only run the house for a few days a year so the queue to get in is multiple weeks. If you're not willing to queue for weeks, you won't get in. Our aim is not to put through many people, there's no need, but to give the small group that do get in the most amazing experience possible. Very unique and very over the top.

gTM: That makes you possibly the most interesting person in the world ever. So they call you Lord British, how did you earn that name?

RG: Interesting story. When I was a freshman at high school, I was at a summer workshop where I was learning how to write computer code, and there were students going around nicknaming everyone they met. When they reached my door, I somehow answered in a way that made them think for a brief moment that I was from England. They said 'hi' and I said 'hello' – something like that. It stuck, though, because I was born in Cambridge and am actually English. I only lived there for a short period of time, but once a British citizen always a British citizen, right? So anyway, as a result, all of my early vanity characters became known as British and when I began to write games, I would always put myself in the game – eventually the Lord British character was born. Also, my first publisher saw my pseudonym inside the game and said, 'you know, Richard Garriot really isn't a very memorable name, so from a market standpoint we should credit Lord British because people will remember it'. Ever since then I've been known as Lord British.

gTM: Of course, that's not the only name you've earned. Many now call you 'The Father of the MMO'. That's quite a mighty title, how do you feel about it?

RG: Well, what's interesting about that is that ever since computers were invented, people have been hooking up and playing games together – long before *Ultima Online*. On the other hand, prior to *Ultima Online* the largest online game had only a few thousand players at any one time. But we believed that this was because nobody had invested graphically or feature-wise to the level that we had with the *Ultima*s. It was very difficult to get funding for *Ultima Online* because nobody thought the market was there. Of course, it turned out to be the best selling Ultima of all time; it sold more than all the others combined many times over. So on the one hand I'm a little uncomfortable being called the father of something that existed before me, but I'm very proud of the fact that *Ultima Online* broke open the genre that's now the fastest growing segment of gaming.

gTM: You've been in this industry for a long while now, and it's obvious that things have changed a lot. Do you feel that it's a more difficult industry to get into nowadays?

RG: Absolutely, throughout my first few years in the business, my schoolteacher would invite me back to talk to the kids. Back then my advice was always 'make sure your parents get a computer in your home, copy programmes from magazines, pull games apart to see how things work and, ta-da, you too can be a successful, wealthy game developer'. It's very different now. You have to chart your education carefully; there are many different courses that you can take that are essential to getting the grounding. Even once you have a degree, there's no guarantee that you'll get a job developing. At NCsoft we almost never hire

HARD SELL

PROMOTION IS HANDLED IN MANY WAYS. Some prepare for a title's launch by flaunting impressive demos, others plaster every phone box in London with posters – see, there are near limitless possibilities. Turning up in the UK in full Lord British attire and then perching upon a throne for all to see? That's just how Richard Garriott handles it. "I remember the first member of the press to come up to me," he tells us. "He looked me up and down and then said 'what the hell are you supposed to be?' Needless to say, the day didn't really get any better. You just don't come to England and sit on a throne – people just don't like it."



"**ULTIMA ONLINE** WAS **SO UNIQUE** TO THOSE PLAYING. **I WAS** REALLY **MOVED BY THE POWER** OF THE GAME"

RICHARD GARRIOTT

"IF YOU WANT A **DEEPLY INTERACTIVE WORLD** THEN YOU'RE GOING TO **WANT TO PLAY ON A PC**"

RICHARD GARRIOTT

CLEAN SLATE

GARRIOTT'S CURRENT PROJECT IS THE MMORPG *TUBULA RASA*. Although a release date for the title is still a fair way off, he is keen to ensure that *Rasa* is an MMO with a difference. All the usual elements expected from the genre will be in place, but we will be seeing a far friendlier experience than we're used to. The endless grind of levelling up characters in order to keep up with friends you wish to play and compete with will be softened, and Garriott plans an MMO where, "your character level won't limit your experience and you won't be penalised for only playing in two-hour sessions".

inexperienced resources, it's now a very difficult thing to get into. It's far more competitive.

gTM: You must have spent many an hour playing MMORPGs. What's been your favourite ever moment while playing?

RG: My favourite moment was in *Ultima Online*. A lot of the time I would go in as a Game Master disguised as a regular player. One day I was walking along a riverbank and there was a person playing as a fisherman. This was very early in *Ultima*, and the entire simulation for the fisherman was that you used a fishing pole on water, and it was 50/50 whether you caught a fish. That was the beginning and end of the simulation. This guy was standing on the bank, wearing a straw hat and cut-off trousers – he certainly looked the part – and he just stood there catching fish. It looked pleasant enough but not what I would personally deem fun. So then this other guy turned up and he was the opposite. He had the fanciest armour and the largest weapons, and he stopped by the fisherman and said something along the lines of, 'poor fisherman, I see you are without sword and shield. I have just returned from the deep, dark dungeon and I have succeeded well. I will share my windfall with you'. He then began to lay out armour and weapons in front of the fisherman. The fisherman said, 'No, no, no. I am not interested in your ways, you ruffian. I am a fisherman. I fish all day, I take my fish to the market and sell them, and then I take my money to the tavern and drink some virtual ale with my friend. Be gone'. The warrior then trundled off. When I saw this I was really moved by the power of the game. It made me aware of the number of diverse opportunities that *Ultima Online* was providing. It was just so unique and important to those playing.

gTM: We all know how great MMO gaming is, but recently there have been concerns over the health of those that spend a little too much time playing these games. What are your views?

RG: The longest I've played in one go is four to eight hours. Yeah, it's uncommon for me but I've done eight hours, although two hours is really the time that I like to spend in one go. This is something we've really tried to address with *Tabula Rasa*, we want to support those that can only afford to play for an hour at a time, and still deliver a rich and detailed experience. I am very aware of the concerns, though, especially over in Korea where online games are far more popular than they are anywhere else in the world, and the government has become deeply involved in the social implications of people spending so much time online. In my view, interacting with people online is just as real and valuable as interacting with people in the real world. The friendships made and the shared experiences are equally as valuable. Interacting with people online is a good thing, although I do agree that healthy people need to have diverse involvement and engagement with the world around them, and there are those that spend too much time online. Having said that, online games are now so popular that you get a wide cross-section of people playing the games. You have casual players, you have obsessive players, you have locked-in computer nerds, and you have the sports jocks that just like to play periodically. When you have all these personality types playing, it makes sense that you see the manifestations of those personality types and what they do in the games. I feel that the people who play obsessively are just easier to see now. If they didn't have online games they'd be obsessively playing miniatures, or obsessively playing chess. It's just far easier to spot any problems now.

gTM: Thanks to Live, more people than ever are now playing online, but on consoles rather than PCs. It won't be long before we see MMORPGs making their way onto consoles, how do you feel this will affect the genre?

In my mind, a console is great for certain games. Your face isn't in the monitor, and when you turn the machine off the game is gone – a great feature for casual gamers. My favourite console game of recent years is *Parapper The Rapper*. It's a game that you play with others who are on the same side of the screen, a shared experience in the living room. When you're playing online with a console, combat-orientated titles like first-person shooters are perfect. The depth of interaction you have with people on the other side is basically target them and then shoot. If you want a deeply interactive world then you're going to want to play on a PC. When you're sitting in front of a PC it's like a gateway, the monitor almost fills your view and you're not in slumber mode. The PC is certainly a superior platform. In the end, we'll see that PCs grow the best virtual worlds, and consoles will have the best shooters. That's how I think it'll turn out.

gTM: Okay, so PCs win the day in the end, but what about the next-gen console battle? Which of the big three do you think will be the most successful?

Wow. Firstly, I don't think I'm qualified to give a good answer. As I'm not a big console gamer, I'm unsure and don't have a strong opinion as to which is technically the best. It really depends on who trips and falls and who blows their release, either by not shipping on time or somehow making their hardware fall below expectation. If they ship late or technically miss the mark then they are not a contender. I've seen plenty of great hardware ignored because it came out six months too late. It's difficult for me to say, but I think these are the parameters that will make all the difference.

UBISOFT

COMMUNITY

EVERY ISSUE, **games™** VISITS A DIFFERENT DEVELOPER. THIS MONTH WE HOP ON A PLANE AND DROP IN ON OUR FRIENDS AT UBISOFT

SHANGHAI

NO, NOT IN PARIS. NO, NOT IN MONTREAL. SAM FISHER'S FUTURE IS BEING SCULPTED IN THE FAR EAST, AS UBISOFT SHANGHAI TAKES THE REIGNS FOR STEALTH'S FIRST NEXT-GENERATION HERO. WE DISCOVER THE GAME, WE DISCUSS THE COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS AND WE TRY THEIR CUCUMBER-FLAVOURED CRISPS…

From the fifteenth floor, you can see everything. The view stretches over Shanghai, and through the thin filter of car smog where the 18 million inhabitants go about their daily routine you can easily pick out different sides and personalities of the city below. The financial district. The construction sites. The tourist trappings. The bustling harbour. The bombed slums. The shopping malls. Shanghai is a growing city freed from the shackles of communism, where you can now buy Diesel jeans or a coffee from Starbucks as easily as you can a Chairman Mao poster.

This is the *Splinter Cell: Double Agent* floor of Ubisoft Shanghai, the studio charged with handling the fourth entry of Ubisoft's flagship stealth series. Life-size Sam Fishers stare at you with plastic eyes, *Double Agent* posters adorn the walls, and magazine covers with the secret agent's trademark scowl are blown up triple their size and proudly placed on display. While the view is impressive – as you might expect from what we're told is the "most expensive building in Shanghai" – it's ten metres down the hall, second on our right where the buzz is happening. It's there that you first pick up the quiet murmurings of a team hard at work.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

Splinter Cell: Double Agent is the first 'pure creation project' for Ubisoft Shanghai, but by no means

HISTORY LESSON

Ubisoft managed to pull a string of hits from nowhere, managing to marry consistency with quality. Ubisoft's next-gen invasion will rely on familiar names yet again…

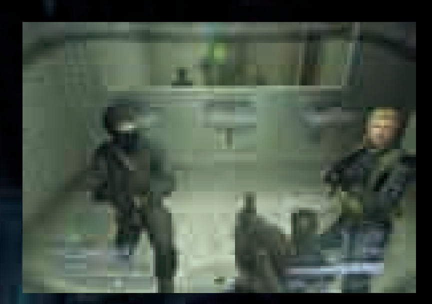
SPLINTER CELL

■ The first viable alternative to the dominant *Metal Gear Solid* and a game that won Hideo Kojima's respect, *Splinter Cell* was damned for its linearity, but won through with its tight pacing, cleverly crafted atmosphere and air of authenticity. The American chest-thumping provided by author Tom Clancy helped this sell in droves stateside.



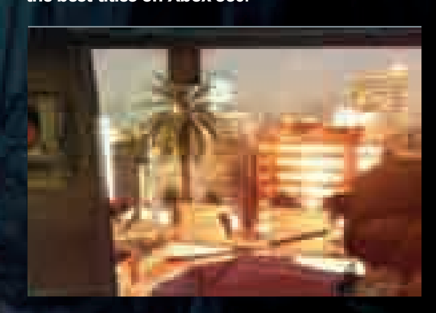
RAINBOW SIX

■ Starting life on PC, this gritty squad shooter was known for its extensive planning BEFORE missions, and low margin for error. The series has moved onto console with mixed results, from good (*Rainbow Six 3*) and bad (*Lockdown*). Ubisoft is shuffling the deck once again for *Rainbow Six: Vegas*.



GHOST RECON

■ While *Rainbow Six* has been seen to reach for a wider demographic, *Ghost Recon* has gone the other way and cranked up the difficulty and squad elements to staggering degrees. The latest entry to the series, *Advanced Warfighter*, is currently one of the best titles on Xbox 360.





Check out the man with the amazing finger-sprouting head.

the first videogame project the studio has tackled. "The studio was set up in 1997 and at that moment we were working on one PSX project," explains producer of *Splinter Cell: Double Agent* on Xbox 360, Yuan Peishing. "Actually, the foundation of this company was built at that time. We had *Rayman 2*, which had great sales, and then we got to PS2, Xbox stage and we have more and more projects like *Rainbow Six*, *Ghost Recon* and, of course, *Splinter Cell*. It all built up from there."

This is something of an understatement. Ubisoft Shanghai hasn't been built up so much as it has snowballed resulting in the monstrous open plan office where the *Double Agent* team is slaving away. The team isn't divided up into small sections sealed off in a darkened corner from the rest of the teams, as seems to be in the 'Setting Up A Games Development Studio 101' guidebook, but works as a whole. We're told that what we're looking at are small micro-teams with working on the new daytime maps, teams working on AI, and so on, but it's hard to tell where one begins and the other ends. Only the on-screen activity of what each Mac is doing give any hints as to what section you're standing in. We watch a developer lay down some items in the sandy backstreets of Kinshasa, the war-torn capital Fisher visits (daytime maps team). Then a voice starts out at the back of the room.

"That's the building Tom Cruise jumps from in *Mission Impossible III*," shouts series producer Julian Gerighty at the back of the studio while a band of journalists watch him run Sam Fisher through the new Shanghai level. He spins the camera so we can see the building exactly as it is in the trailer for Cruise's flick, "but our level is on the Hyatt, which is taller." He pauses. "So f*ck Tom Cruise!" Cue quiet giggles from the crowd and a big smile from Gerighty himself.

No one else seems to notice this outburst from the loud series producer, or rather if they have noticed, they seem too preoccupied to join in. There are local Chinese quietly working away on their Macs, a French power corner staffed by talent brought over from Ubisoft Montreal, an English producer playing air drums with his headphones on ("The only problem with Shanghai is there are no pubs," he later tells us) and various ambiguous ethnicities in between. What's the main language here? French? Chinese? "No, it's English," laughs Daniel Roy, producer and French Canadian hailing from Montreal. "English is our middle ground."

English, French, Chinese… it's hard to imagine everything runs smoothly without some communication problems. "Yeah, there's a little bit," Peishing hesitantly admits, drawing out the 'yeah' in a strained manner. "It depends on the team because level designers, programmers, game designers… when I recruit them, English is something you have to check, so we don't have any problems communicating with them. On graphics, animations and artists, we're more concerned with their actual skills. So for those teams, ex-pats and Chinese will have problems communicating. But we always have a leader to help to smooth complications, and the company provides English lessons for the local people. At the same time, they also provide Chinese lessons for ex-pats. So somehow, someway, we manage to communicate with each other."

WELCOME TO THE FOLD

Still, there are plenty of former Ubisoft Montrealers about, chatting away to each other in their native tongues. Tom Cruise fan Julian Gerighty is one. Hugues Martel, the sequence director brought in from the animation industry to spice up the cut-scenes, also joined from Montreal. Eccentric lead audio producer Romain His is another example, and he also provides the best explanation as to why Amon Tobin's music won't be returning for *Double Agent*: "My mother, she would not understand Amon's music. It will be chaos for her, this break beat thing." We fear how people of Shanghai will take to the eccentricities of guys like His and, perhaps more importantly, how His will have taken to the eccentricities of Shanghai.

"I think many of the people from Montreal are excited to be here," explains Roy when asked how everyone's settled down. "In Montreal, there are a lot of people, so it's very tough to prove yourself and advance in such a huge structure. I think many of them feel that when they come here, they have a chance to prove what they can do." Yuan Peishing backs up his colleague's thoughts. "Compared to Montreal studios, we are small," he adds. "So to be frank, there really are more opportunities here for personal development. So they come here, they are excited, they want to prove what they can do and prove their capability to the company. And the company will see that and give them the opportunity."

Still, going by the wonderful barometer of opinion that is The Internet™, most fans have been wondering why Ubisoft Shanghai has been given a project of such huge importance to take on. Mis-spelt anger over at GameFAQs and table thumping on various forums suggests that most fans have neither faith nor confidence in Ubisoft Shanghai's ability to drive the series forward. The previous entry, *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory*, was a confident step back in the right direction after *Pandora Tomorrow* wobbled with its questionable length and prickly online modes. Far be it for **games**™ to become the middleman between the Internet and game developers, but it's a fair question. Why has Ubisoft Shanghai found itself looking after Ubisoft's baby?

"We started working on *Splinter Cell* since the first *Splinter Cell*," says Roy. "The *Splinter Cell* PS2 version was done here. At the time, it was considered an impossible project to make on PS2 because it was dependent on the Xbox hardware. *Splinter Cell* PS2 was a big success from a technological point of view, but also successful porting. We gained experience on







"THE SHANGHAI STUDIO IS **SET TO GROW** VERY BIG. I THINK WE CAN **PROVE OURSELVES**"

DANIEL ROY, FRENCH CANADIAN PRODUCER

INCOMING…

Now Ubisoft has branches all over the world, it can afford to tool up for a full-on next-gen assault as it sees fit. These are the titles will be spearheading the next wave of Ubigames…

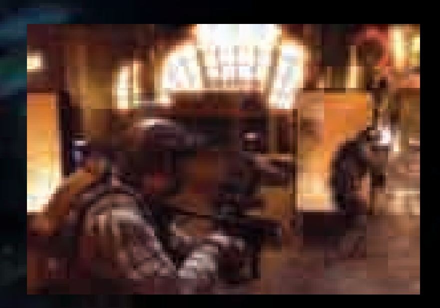
SPLINTER CELL: DOUBLE AGENT

■ Attempting to mix ethics into its potent stealth cocktail, this project is far more ambitious than anyone is prepared to give it credit for. Not content with the moral slant, Ubisoft Shanghai has also ditched the trademark light/dark stealth system for something different and added daytime missions too. Brave? Yes. Successful? The signs are good.



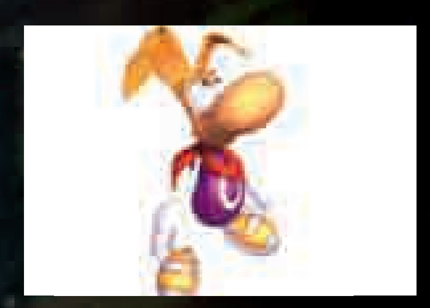
RAINBOW SIX: VEGAS

■ After the disastrous *Rainbow Six: 'Dumbdown'*, Ubisoft has shifted tack and moved the action to the lights of Las Vegas, setting the game there and stripping the squad members down to three. Red flags, meet Rainbow Six. There are plenty of "oh oh…" elements already and it's going to take one hell of a juggling act to mix these new ideas together – win old fans back and bring new fans in.



RAYMAN 360

■ No official details, no screens, absolutely nothing yet on the next-gen *Rayman*, but you can count on a few things at this early stage. It'll be a platformer. Rayman won't have any limbs. He'll have a charisma count of nil and – despite being a competent game – most 360 owners won't care.



"I THINK **FOREIGN** COMPANIES ARE **STARTING TO EYE CHINA.** THEY SEE THE **POTENTIAL** THAT UBISOFT SAW SIX OR SEVEN YEARS AGO"

YUAN PEISHING, PRODUCER, SPLINTER CELL: DOUBLE AGENT (X360)

the *Splinter Cell* engine there, which made the decision of porting *Pandora Tomorrow* in Shanghai a logical one. We already knew the engine, we were on familiar ground and expanding on it. So after doing *Splinter Cell* and then *Pandora Tomorrow* which was also a big success for us, it was the right time for us to do an original episode of *Splinter Cell* for Xbox 360."

Game development studios are dime-a-dozen in Japan, but just a few miles east in China they're almost unheard of. Even Korea has its own claim to fame thanks to MMORPG powerhouse Webzen. Given its unique location on the game development map as the biggest name in China, Ubisoft Shanghai faces some unique problems. "Actually, there is a good side and a bad side," explains Peishing. "In Shanghai studios, we have had



a good foundation for years and we already have a big bunch of experts. But there's also a problem that further recruitment is a little harder than in other countries because in China the games industry is very new. Actually, we train experts and maybe we're the only top gaming experts in China so if we want to recruit, we do have some problems in recruiting Chinese experts in the gaming industry. This is the difficulty we are facing."

For the people who are brought onboard, are there any advantages unique to being able to draw upon the local Chinese population to fill empty development seats? "Definitely," says Peishing (who, admittedly, may be biased). "Our Shanghai map is by our local people. We're in Shanghai, why not create a Shanghai map? It's provided by our Chinese graphic artists. I think there are a lot of people here who want to prove themselves. Ubisoft provides an opportunity to work on a next-gen title and maybe as the Chinese people play a lot of games, we just want to prove what we can really do for the games industry."

CHINESE ROCKS

With China growing as an economic power in the face of a bickering Europe and receding United States, it seems inevitable that if *Double Agent* succeeds, it'll open the floodgates for more companies to try their luck. "There are some big game companies now opening new branches in Shanghai and in China,"

Shoot him or allow him to live? These choices will now affect the way the story plays out.

explains Peishing. "I know, locally the gaming studios are booming for a few years now," adds Roy. "It's growing and it's growing fast. I think that foreign companies are starting to eye China. They see the potential that Ubisoft saw six or seven years ago, so it's definitely happening."

By this time, word has spread that one of the local delicacies is available to sample – cucumber flavoured crisps – and we're aware that Roy and Peishing are on tight deadlines and their eyes glance over at the door with increasing frequency. Maybe they've heard about the crisps too. In any case, a final bread-and-butter question to wrap things up: does Ubisoft Shanghai see Ubisoft Montreal as friend or foe? "Speaking as a Montrealer, I think we're going after them," says Roy confidently, grinning like a Cheshire cat. "I think that the Shanghai studio is set to grow very big. The success that we can get on *Splinter Cell: Double Agent* and future next-generation titles, I think we can prove ourselves. We're still very hungry for growth and success. There's a lot of energy and people wanting to change things. There's also a very strong work discipline. People work really, really hard here. They want to get results."

With that, Roy and Peishing head back to their respective work booths to knuckle down and apply the finishing touches to the game that will sculpt the future of this studio. We quietly watch as some of the sneakier developers take advantage of the general chaos of a press day and slink off to steal a few hours on *Double Agent's* multi-player modes. Eventually, guilt gets the better of them and they also head back to their desks. Eventually, six o'clock rolls around and everyone files out of the building as the sounds of English, French and Chinese nattering compete for volume. All that's left is a lonely life-size Sam Fisher figure staring down an empty corridor, and some half-eaten packs of the truly, truly awful cucumber crisps.

Splinter Cell: Double Agent is shaping up to be a real leap of faith as it takes a brave step in a new direction seeking to rejuvenate the series with a vitality and enthusiasm that could only be found by taking the game far away from its birthplace. Ubisoft is so pleased with progress thus far, it saw fit to buy the thirteenth floor of these offices too, a painful blow to the wallet when you're talking in terms of the most expensive building in Shanghai. It's on this new thirteenth floor that Ubisoft's faith in its Shanghai branch is confirmed, as an undisclosed 'secret' project is beginning life (Gerighty explains, there is no fourteenth floor because '14 sounds like 'death' in Chinese). The view probably isn't as nice as it is here on the fifteenth floor. But then again, where is?



REVIEWS

THE AVERAGE

Scoring's a messy business when it comes to videogames, so we keep things as simple as possible here at games™. Marking out of a possible ten, a game that is decidedly average will score five – that doesn't necessarily mean it's bad, just that it doesn't do anything particularly special against its peers. We also refuse to bow to PR pressure, meaning that scores are our genuine opinion: we sing the praises of the great games and give the lesser ones the scorn they deserve. You might not always agree with us, but we're just trying to help – after all, everyone has an opinion, right?

REFERENCE KIT

All the PC content for the magazine is tested on the über-specced Alienware Area-51™ 7500 extreme performance desktop PC. For information on Alienware products, point your browsers to www.alienware.co.uk or call them freephone on 0800 279 9751.





DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Square Enix

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
¥8,990

RELEASE
TBA
(Japan: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1

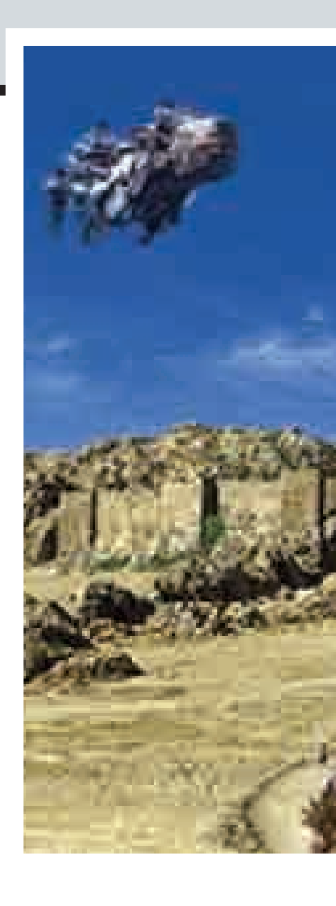
WHO DOESN'T WANT TO BE A SKY PIRATE THESE DAYS?

FINAL FANTASY XII

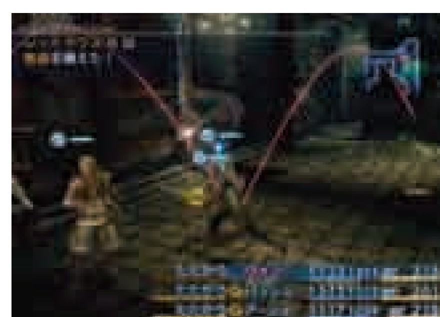
However good you may be at counting, 2 million is still a suitably massive number. And after just two weeks on sale in Japan, that's how many copies of *Final Fantasy XII* were sold. It's not unusual for games to hit such figures (*Animal Crossing: Wild World* reached the same milestone recently) but the maths associated with such a speedy sell-through is mind-blowing. In *Final Fantasy's* case, it equates to almost one hundred copies sold every minute for two weeks. Factor in the fact that shops close occasionally, and the statistics get more impressive. We'd paraphrase the old adage and say that 2 million gamers can't be wrong, but it isn't true – there will definitely be a small contingent that doesn't get on with *FFXII*, and it's not tricky to see why.

It's brave to change a series that's been lining up combatants to take turns at hitting enemies since gaming began. As usual, you'll have the choice of Active or Wait mode for combat, but the decision has never been as important as it is here. While Active mode has always meant just inputting commands quicker, it's now a full time job. With allies governed by the excellent Gambit system, they won't be waiting for your commands (unless you want them to, and turn off Gambits like some kind of buffoon), and you'll need to keep an eye on them to make sure they're not doing anything stupid. This comes down to equipment choices – since AI routines are fully programmable through the Gambit system, comrades who set up to attack enemies on sight could end up using their elemental weapon on the wrong creature and healing it instead of doing damage. It's not hard to fix and you can either simply issue overriding commands in real-time, or turn off their Gambits altogether and let the other guys get on with it.

The Gambit system itself deserves further explanation. With only a few slots in which to place commands, and a couple of options early in the game, this basically lets you set up simple routines such as auto heal when HP gets low or simple 'attack nearest enemy' commands. But as the game goes on and you fill the list of Gambits and open up more slots to use, you'll be able to get far more technical – setting up your team with the right Gambits is essential, so you'll need to splash out a fair bit of cash in the Gambit shops in order to get the party working to optimum performance. Chaining Gambits with the same



"EXPERIMENTING WITH THE GAMBIT SYSTEM WILL ALLOW YOU TO CUSTOMISE YOUR PARTY IN WAYS THAT MANY ROLE-PLAYING GAMES COULD NEVER EVEN DREAM OF"





Don't you just hate it when you're walking down the street and there's a bloody great turkey getting in your face. We do.

gamesTM

FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

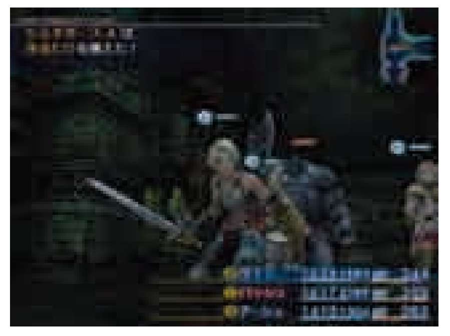
MONEY TOO TIGHT TO MENTION: Gone are the days of enemies dropping copious gold – if you want to strike it rich in Ivalice, you'll need to get your hands dirty with stealing and trading.



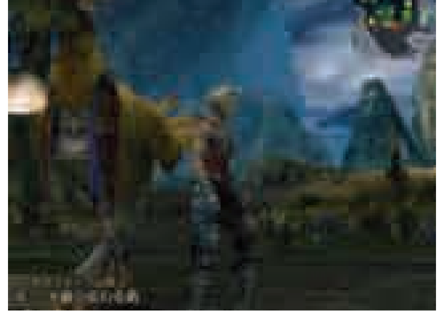
MOB SEEKER'S ALLOWANCE

The game is riddled with side-quests, but the main source of income in Ivalice is the Mob Hunt. Working for Montblanc of *FF Tactics Advance* fame, these tricky missions require you to hunt powerful foes. You can take on as many contracts as you wish and many can be carried out as you play through without backtracking. As well as rewards from whoever gives you the contract, Montblanc is eager to reward hunters with cash or items – you can find all manner of handy artefacts that open up new areas of the map or help you get closer to those elusive missing summons in this way.





■ You're not looking too bad, but the guy behind you is still looking harder.



■ Complete the game six times and Big Bird becomes playable. Honest.

action allows for some really deep customisation. Linking 'Cast Firaga' to both 'Enemy Weak To Fire' and 'Enemy HP >2000', for example, will make sure that the powerful magic is only used on suitably tough adversaries, and by experimenting with this system, you'll be able to customise your party in ways that many RPGs could never dream of. Even your main character can be equipped with Gambits, so that once you're in range of a foe, the whole party acts entirely on Gambits, allowing you to sit back and jump in only when necessary.

Doing away with the screen-shattering random encounters, the pace of the game and the way in which it is played change enormously. Playing out like a strange hybrid of *Knights Of The Old Republic* and any other MMORPG, enemies roam the massive areas, and it's up to you whether you take them on or run for dear life. Sometimes the latter is the only option – rare powerful foes make their homes in every major area and while they won't always attack you on sight, they can be wound up if you get in their way or do something with which they take issue. Also, with the world being so sprawling, you can wander into a tough area long before you seriously think about tackling the residents. Again, running away is pretty cool at a time like this and there are plenty of places to go.

Just looking at some of the larger maps is daunting and getting back to Rabanastre – Vaan's home and the central city of the game – would be even more so were it not for the scattered teleport crystals. Certain save points can be travelled between to reduce journey times, and once you've tried to get from one side of the map to the other, you'll have nothing but praise for them. With settings ranging from thick jungles

FAQs

Q. HOW LONG IS IT?
50-odd hours before you get all of the summons or go rounding up Mobs. Pretty damn long, in other words.

Q. WHAT GENDER IS VAAN?
While his wardrobe and mannerisms may not suggest it, he's actually fully male.

Q. ARE YOU QUITE SURE?
Positive. As well as being voiced by a male actor, he likes nothing more than discussing 'hot chicks', cars and football over a few pints. Probably.

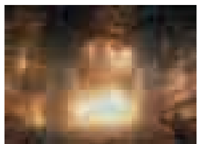
"WITH ITS THEMES OF WAR, ASPIRATION, LOVE AND REVENGE, FINAL FANTASY XII'S NARRATIVE IS A SUITABLY GRANDIOSE AFFAIR RIDDLED WITH MORE THAN ITS FAIR SHARE OF TWISTS AND TURNS"



TIMELINE HIGHLIGHTS

THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE THEM

1 HOUR



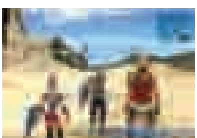
A stunning opening cut-scene was a given, and now you have Vaan vs the big city. Too early to call just yet, but there's definitely something special about this game.

1 DAY



The sensation of leaving the big city is an exciting one, and you've probably felt it a few times by now. Penelo should be with you, and the Gambit system might make sense.

1 WEEK



20-odd Mobs down, several optional summons under your belt, and a steadily rising experience level, and things are really picking up for your little party.

to towering temples, there's a lot of variety in the locations and, as you might expect, you won't be seeing them all over the course of the adventure. No, if you want to get everything the game has to offer, you'll need to talk to a lot of people and venture off the beaten track a hell of a lot. It's worthwhile, although you'll need truckloads of experience and License Points to get anywhere.

Governing abilities this time is the License Board, the spiritual successor to the Sphere Grid of *FFX* and a mechanic that works in almost exactly the same way. Everyone's grid is identical, and rather than just include skills, it now also determines what equipment and summons can be used. Filling the grid is only half the battle though, in order to use a skill you've enabled on the grid, you need to haul ass to a shop and buy the relevant scroll or skill sheet. This system gives a nice degree of personalisation to your party and although certain characters are obviously tailored for certain roles from their stat sheets, whether you follow that or not is your choice.

With its themes of war, aspiration, love and revenge, *XII*'s narrative is a suitably grandiose affair, riddled with more than its fair share of twists and turns. As Square Enix always seems to do so well, characters quickly grow from nobodies (often of the androgynous variety) into



Come on chap, turn that frown upside-down. Or something.

people you really want to help out and watching them interact never fails to be interesting and/or amusing, depending on the situation. Square Enix really has mastered animation, and it's this that keeps the characterisation so believable – nobody cuts from stock idle animation into their 'horror1' routine, rather everything moves fluidly and realistically to the point where you wonder just how much of the development time went into this area alone. It's a joy to behold, not just because of the movement, but for the whole package. From design choices and settings to outfits and enemies, everything is downright beautiful and the whole pastel style of the game carves *XII* its own niche somewhere between the attempted realism approach (*FFX*) and the out-and-out cartoon style (*DQVIII*) to fantastic effect.

As a radical departure from what fans may be expecting, there'll no doubt be die-hard *FF* fanatics reduced to tears by this new direction. We'd point such people in the direction of the countless 'old-fashioned' RPGs that pour out







This is a *Final Fantasy* game so we have to show some FMV screenshots by law. This is some sort of very pretty parade.



gamesTM

FUSED

BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER

THE OLD: Plenty of classic ideas and characters here.

THE NEW: But the fresh MMO-inspired combat really steals the limelight.



■ If we lost 90 and 97 we'd only have 74 left. If we gained it, we'd be gods.

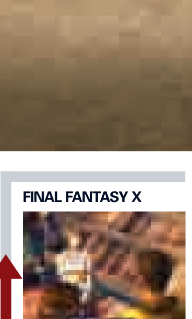
of Japan each year – there's nothing wrong with traditional RPG rules per se, and the *Suikodens* and *Shadow Hearts* of this world get by perfectly well doing things the way they've been done since the 8-bit era. For a series that's been running that long, though, something has to change at some point, and this is one such juncture. Like it or not, the *Final Fantasy* series has come of age and this new approach to the genre is a breath of fresh air. It'll be months before an English language release, and until then we can neither confirm nor deny the existence of anything so cringe-inducing as *Final Fantasy X*'s infamous laughing scene. But as Square Enix's localisation team toils to prepare the game for the west, we can rest easy now we know that this generation's final *FF* is as strong an episode as there has been since the Nineties. A truly splendid adventure awaits those not put off by the new rules of engagement.



VERDICT 8/10

A FUSION OF STYLES THAT ISN'T FOR EVERYONE

FINAL FANTASY X



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



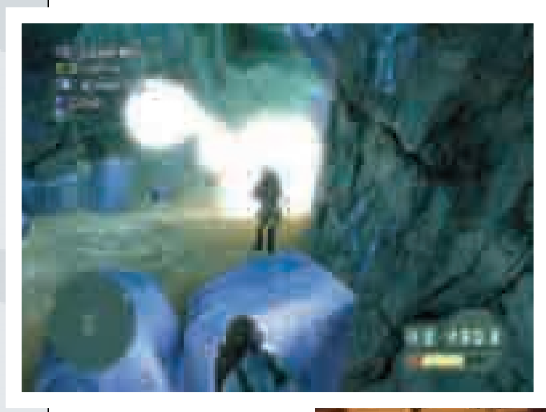
FINAL FANTASY VII

CHOCOBO RACING

Everyone's favourite giant yellow bird that doesn't have any educational value is back, but despite what cut-scenes may suggest, they won't be playing a major role. Their main purpose in *XII* is speedy travel giving you a few minutes of uninterrupted motion before your rented bird runs off to do something else. The prospect of mounted combat had us salivating like chimps at the World Banana Fair, and to tease us so is very naughty. Chocobos do serve one essential purpose: allowing you to traverse overgrown areas. Sure, they're underplayed, but when is a Chocobo not a good thing?



■ Run, quickly, before lots of really big numbers fall out of your head.



Rogue can still shoot and throw grenades blind while ducking behind cover.



The futuristic world of the comic is done excellent justice by the game.

ROGUE TROOPER

ONE GAME THAT ISN'T TOO BIG FOR ITS BOOTS

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PS2, PC

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Eidos

DEVELOPER
Rebellion

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2 (2-4 Online)

Sometimes you wish the future would just hurry up and arrive. All of the hyperbole surrounding the arrival of next-gen technology has so far paid off with one botched console release and a slow drip of delays and vague details on the other two. Meanwhile, the critics, appetites whetted for never-before-imagined levels of gaming brilliance, have to continue analysing current-generation software with something approaching objectivity and vigour, despite the best efforts of the industry to convince us that it's all basically redundant.

It's tough to rate an ordinary RPG now that the life-consuming brilliance of *Oblivion* has arrived, and it's harder still to assess a tactical shooter with *Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter* casting a long shadow across the genre. Both titles benefit hugely from strengths (be it graphics, depth, scope) specifically derived from the power of the Xbox 360, strengths that current-gen games cannot reasonably be expected to have. This isn't such an issue for truly brilliant titles – masterpieces shine on any format – but for the majority of good games that simply do their job and do it well, it is something of a critical trap. How do you judge whether a game hits its targets when the very nature of those targets is changing all the time?

Rogue Trooper is one such game. Unashamedly current gen, it could have been released in 2001 and looks, feels and plays exactly the same. The gameplay is linear, the landscape is relatively small, you can't pick and choose your missions, and there aren't a hundred characters to talk to, squads to command or pointless mini-games to distract from the action. Rebellion has chosen to get the best from the current playing field rather than taking tentative steps toward the next one, and the result is a fun, smart and refreshingly uncomplicated experience.

Adapted from a *2000AD* comic strip, *Rogue Trooper* is set on Nu-Earth, a futuristic world with a poisonous atmosphere, that's being torn apart by a war between the powerful, despotic Norts and the rebellious, ill-equipped Southers. Rogue is a Genetic Infantryman (GI), one of a legion of powerful clones bred by the Southers that can withstand the planet's deadly gas and help end the war. After his unit is betrayed and massacred by its leader, Rogue goes AWOL and embarks on a mission to seek revenge for the deaths of his allies.

As a concept, it certainly has more bite than the clean-cut likes of *Spider-Man* or *Superman*, but it also retains an element of anonymity, freeing it from the priggish backbiting that so often hampers comic book adaptations. Not that this would

FAQs

Q. IS THERE A MULTI-PLAYER MODE?
Yes, two people can play in split-screen mode.

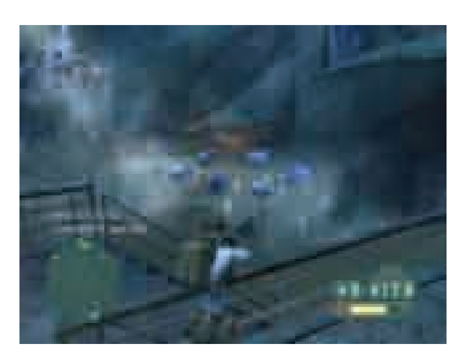
Q. WHAT ABOUT ONLINE?
You can do that too, but with Xbox Live you can have up to four players.

Q. THAT ISN'T MANY...
True, but it does provide another facet to the game's appeal, and at least the option is there.



BROTHERS IN ARMS

In *Rogue Trooper*, your kit is far more than just clothing and machinery, they are your friends, and knowing their uses will pay dividends. Gunnar is your rifle, he can modify himself to incorporate different types of ammunition. He can also be set up as a sentry, mowing down all enemies in range, leaving you free to do other things. Helm is your helmet, a communications expert who can hack into computers, open doors and even project a holographic image of you to create distractions. Bagman is a bag. You can carry stuff in him. That's it.


Stealth is helped by modifying your rifle to aim true over long distances.


Rogue's enemies are susceptible to the poisonous air. Shoot their air tanks and watch 'em explode.

have been much of a concern, though, because Rebellion has done a great job of capturing the mood and look of the comic, with Rogue's distinctive looks making him a particularly unusual but endearing protagonist.

Action is very much of the 'bullets first, questions later' school, and while there are stealth-based kill moves to enjoy, opportunities to use them are thin on the ground. This isn't a huge problem, however, as the game's limited playing space and fair-to-middling enemy AI would make excessive stealth-play tricky. Okay, so *Rogue Trooper* isn't the longest or most difficult game you can buy, but the combat is highly enjoyable and enlivened by several smart touches.

Rogue can salvage parts and equipment from pretty much anything he kills, which can then be used to manufacture new weapons or improve existing ones. It is only subtly different to the rigid weapon selection offered by the majority of third-person shooters, but that degree of extra control provides some welcome depth. It may only be a little, but it certainly isn't too much, and for a game like *Rogue Trooper* that is very important.

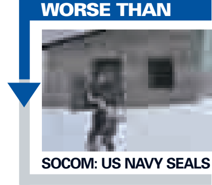
Perhaps the most complicated challenge, relatively speaking, in terms of gameplay lies in mastering Gunnar, Bagman and Helm – your gun, bag and helmet – which have had the personalities of three of your fallen comrades implanted within them. Each is a sentient being with its own personality, advice and insults, and each one's attributes can be used to your advantage in difficult situations (see 'Brothers In Arms'). The variation in gameplay that this offers is pleasing, but, like the stealth and salvage features, Rebellion has kept things fun by ensuring that while they can always be used, seldom are they absolutely necessary.

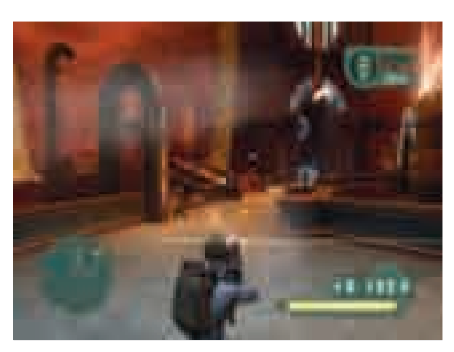
Rogue Trooper never aimed high enough to be truly brilliant, but its mix of exciting action and slight but cunning gameplay innovation is more than satisfactory. At a time when the industry is in the thrall of a revolution that hasn't yet happened – and may not ever actually come to pass – there is something oddly reassuring about a game that keeps its horizons narrow to get the job done well. The onset of the next generation could see such simplistic, uncluttered games disappear altogether, but right now *Rogue Trooper* still has its place.

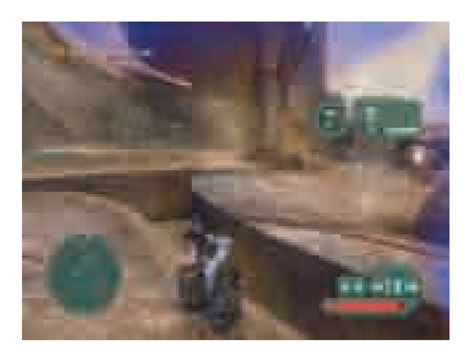
VERDICT 7/10
IT MAY NOT LAST LONG, BUT IS GOOD NONETHELESS

BRUTE FORCE

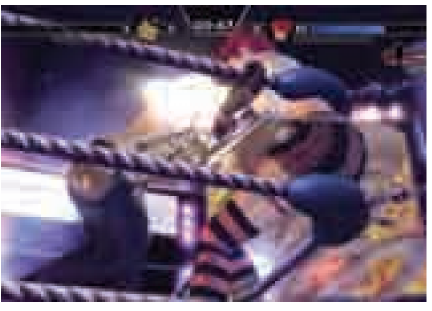
BETTER THAN

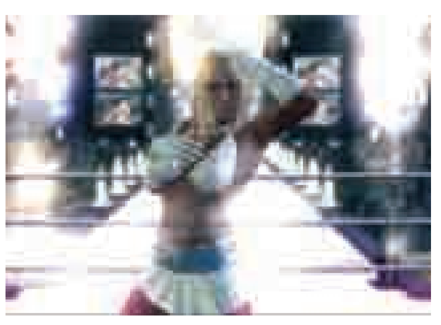
WORSE THAN

SOCOM: US NAVY SEALS


The atmosphere of the *2000AD* comic has been captured nicely.


Rogue Trooper encompasses all the best features of current-gen games.

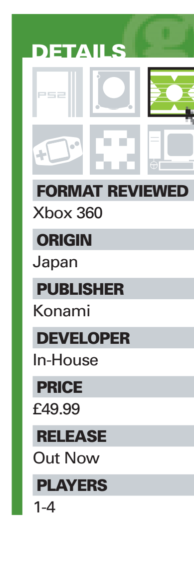

Blimey, steady on. Some of these costumes are almost prohibitively in your face.


At least Candy Cane is still around in all her artificial rock-chick glory.


The entrance sequences are at least amusing. Mostly.

GET READY TO OGLE

RUMBLE ROSES XX



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox 360

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Konami

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£49.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-4

The primary appeal of the first *Rumble Roses* game was its barefaced ridiculousness. Hiding a very average wrestling game behind an unashamedly ostentatious cast of scantily clad female characters and a number of amusingly sexualised match types, nobody expected any more than a few moments of light-hearted entertainment from the title. This time around, though, we expect something more – this is the Xbox 360's very first wrestling game, and ideally we'd like something to pay attention to other than the in-your-face schoolboy eroticism. Unfortunately for all of us, the game's actual wrestling mechanic is only marginally more sophisticated than its worryingly basic sexuality.

Firstly, and most noticeably, the characters themselves have barely changed since 2004, and there are no new ones. They're still busty caricatures of various arbitrary fetishes – the sweet little Japanese girl, the all-American cowgirl, the dominatrix, the pigtail-wearing mini-skirt-wearing rock chick and so on – with very little move variety. There are a few recognisable styles, but the fact that there is only one grapple button and one strike button means that you will be seeing the same moves over and over again throughout the game – after all, there are only so many ways that an under-dressed nurse and a cheerleader can slap each other about in a vaguely suggestive manner.

It's this lack of variety that is the actual wrestling's main problem, although it is an improvement over the original's occasionally imprecise and frustrating ring matches. Ideally, a wrestling game should involve more than mashing two buttons. Counters can be performed, although there's little skill to them – essentially, it's mashing the same buttons while holding RB. What's more, once a wrestler ends up on the ground, there's very little chance that they'll be able to get up again for quite a while – counters just don't seem to work against submission moves, and it's perfectly possible to just perform the same submission move again and again until the opponent eventually gives in. The crowd doesn't seem to mind, and moves actually get stronger with repetition – there's no punishment for cheap tactics, so you can win pretty much any match with ease after a mere two hours of play.

This, of course, is just the normal wrestling – *Rumble Roses* also features a 'Street' match

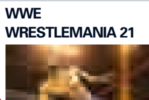
FAQs

Q. HOW MANY CHARACTERS?
11. Each with Good, Evil and Superstar versions. They're the same as the PS2 version's girls.

Q. ISN'T THAT A BIT LAZY?
Yes. Yes, it is.

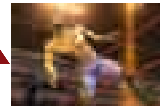
Q. NOT A SINGLE MALE WRESTLER!?
We recommend the WWE games for all your male homoerotic wrestling needs.

WWE WRESTLEMANIA 21



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



WWE SMACKDOWN! VS RAW 2006

This is the Street Fight mode, which tries to lampoon *DOA*, but ends up just showing up how weak *Roses XX* is in comparison.

mode, which was originally intended to lampoon *Dead Or Alive* but instead just shows how weak *Rumble Roses* is in comparison. Essentially, it's just the wrestling mode, but with a depleting energy bar and walls that do damage. It's just as unresponsive, just as loop-prone as the stadium matches, meaning that, essentially, the first wrestler to land a move inevitably wins the match. Hardly the most advanced tactics we have ever seen.

Even if you want to, though, introducing tactics to matches is more trouble than it's worth, as the Single-Player mode is really nothing more than an exhibition – you fight some matches in some places, which makes your popularity go up or down, and at seemingly random intervals you get a title match. There's no structure, no repercussions, no sense of consequence or reward – costumes are so easy to buy that they'd serve as no incentive even if you were desperate for them. It seems somewhat bizarre that the single-player element should be so threadbare this time around; it's not like this is exactly a game you'd want to show off to friends. The first game's Story mode was one of its few redeeming features – the girls' stories were so ridiculously nonsensical and absurdly sexualised that they at least provided amusement value. Here, there's just nothing substantial to make you want to play the game at all, unless you're the sort of person likely to appreciate the game's sinister Photo Shoot option, or the even more sinister Queen's Match where the loser has to perform some pre-decided degrading act like dancing in her underwear while the winner moves the camera around and zooms in on her crotch/arse/breasts. Afterwards, she bursts into tears. That's just worrying.

MISSING LINK

games™

WHAT'S MISSING FROM THIS TITLE

CLOTHING: After a while, all that flesh starts to wear on the eyes.

SOPHISTICATION: Not to mention the fact that matches quickly become an absolute breeze.

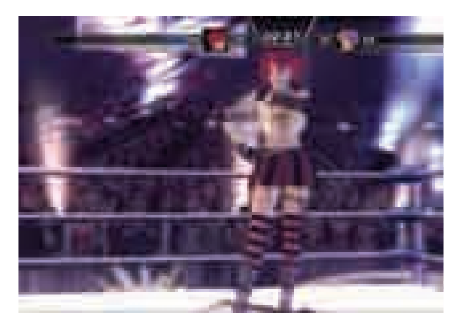
In multi-player, though, the game does redeem itself. On Live and with friends, cheap tactics are discouraged and the tag team matches can be great fun (especially the double-up team moves, which are often so elaborate that it's difficult to figure out whose limbs belong to whom). The predictable AI is alleviated when you play with friends, and at least then you have someone else to laugh with at the game's brazen softcore smut – playing on your own, you just feel slightly dirty.

There are worse wrestling games out there (*Wrestlemania 21*, we're looking at you). At least *Rumble Roses XX* is solid, and if you can put up with its general silliness and unrelenting tits-and-arse nonsense then it can also be enjoyable (although it gave us a bit of a headache after a very short amount of time). Besides, there's always the novelty and mild titillation value if you're into that kind of thing. Which, of course, you aren't… are you?

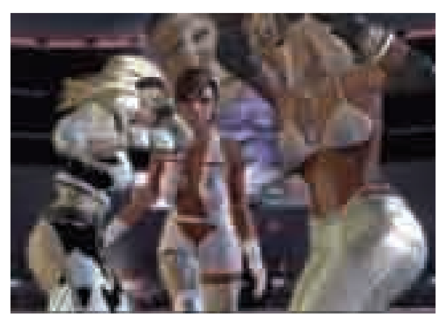
VERDICT 5/10
SOLID BUT UNINSPIRING

SUPERSTAR

As well as Good and Evil, you can also unlock a Superstar version of each fighter by getting their Popularity up to 80 in the Single-Player mode. The Superstar version has slightly different moves and better costumes, but otherwise is the same, which highlights the laziness of the character selection. Really, more than 11 would have been nice, as would some new characters – all wrestlers here can be found in lower-resolution form in the PS2 *Rumble Roses* title. Surely the game's target audience would be bored with them by now?



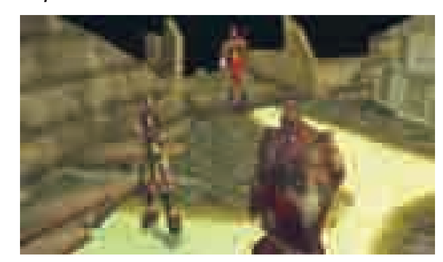
She's a little teapot, but where the hell's her spout?



Rumble Roses' trademark no clothes clothes make a glamorous return.



How this mercenary gets time to layer her hair, wax and pluck her eyebrows we'll never know.



The fat guy is a disciple apparently. We don't know what it is about thier lifestyle that makes them so very fat though.



Look upon the evil warlord and dispair. Check out all the fire behind him, it seems to follow him around. Toasty.

games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

ONE MORE TIME: The item generation system guarantees a unique set up every time you play. **TRANSFORMER:** Despite being something of a pointless gimmick, the new transformation skill adds a little extra to the combat options.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PSP

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Ubisoft

DEVELOPER
Sony Online Entertainment

PRICE
£34.99

RELEASE
2 June

PLAYERS
1-4

UNTOLD LEGENDS: THE WARRIOR'S CODE

IT'S NOT EASY BEING GREEDY



Greed. It's a wonderful thing, isn't it? We've all been there – who doesn't instantly turn into a covetous item hog the minute they get their hands on an RPG? You'll search every square inch of a level, spend the best part of a weekend fiddling with block puzzles, you'll mercilessly slaughter entire families, chat to endless droves of NPCs and backtrack for hours on the off chance that a recent skill acquisition will deliver access to some immorally powerful weapon or trinket. Granted, not all in the genre inspire this kind of rabid cupidity, but if you're the acquisitive sort you'll be familiar with Sony Online Entertainment's top-down action/RPG titles. Welcome to Avarice.

From the moment you're introduced to *Untold Legends: The Warrior's Code* you're overwhelmed by a kind of grasping materialism usually only encountered on those rare trips to Ikea. The once peaceful city of Koryn Thal has been overrun by an evil warlord who's been terrorising the citizens for almost two decades. We couldn't give a flying gonk. We want to know where our next pair of polished Braces of Trepidation are coming from.

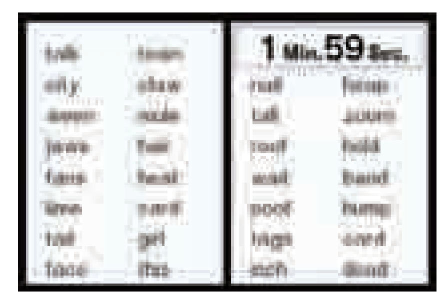
The city's population of changelings – of which you're one – have been driven underground. Again, set against the desire for a fine woven veil of protection, this is something of minimal import. You're charged with the task of righting all the monstrous evils committed by this wicked tyrant, who happens to be the king's half brother. Nope, we're not in the slightest bit bothered. All we want is a gilded Cesta of Divinity, or some other such randomly generated tool of unparalleled destruction. You get the idea.

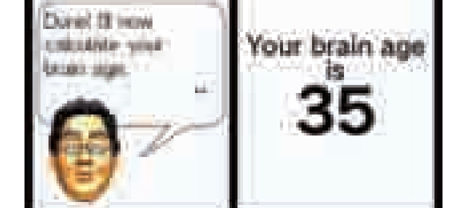
And that's the only real appeal. Were it not for the alarming array of weapons, objects and charms *Untold Legends* dangles in front of you, you'd be hard pushed to get deep enough into it to have any kind of fun at all. Underlying the involved collection of weapon, armour, and item menus is a fairly standard skills evolution system and a rather out of place transformation mechanic – well, you are a changeling – that really only serves to help you in those toe-to-toe boss face offs.

No, don't be fooled into thinking this adventure makes any kind of departure from the model arrangement of any of the series. Clearly nothing new then, but given the previous iteration's success stateside, there's little chance the format would see anything but the most negligible tinkering, and quite rightly so, as *Untold Legends: The Warrior's Code* fits as nicely into the PSP as your hand into a silk-lined Gauntlet of Vitality.

VERDICT 5/10
SAME AS EVER, BUT STILL FUN




The most interesting screenshot to have ever made it into games™. Fact.

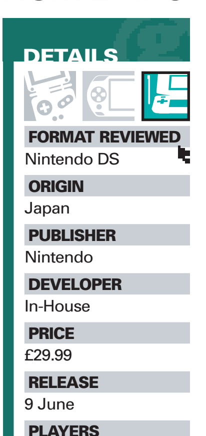


Keep plugging away and you can get that down to 34.


Brain Training also comes with 100 sudoku puzzles.

PROF KAWASHIMA'S BRAIN TRAINING: HOW OLD IS YOUR BRAIN?

HUMILIATION, NINTENDO STYLE



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Nintendo DS

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
In-House

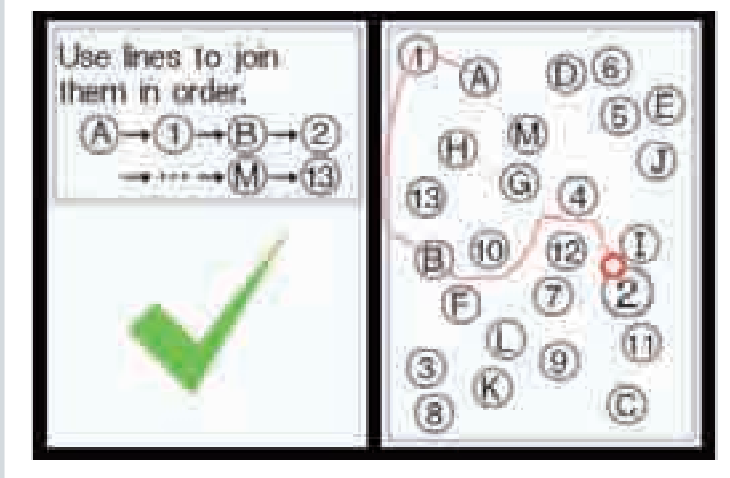
PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
9 June

PLAYERS
1-15

A bona fide cultural phenomenon in the east, Prof Kawashima's attempt to raise the IQ of the world's population has challenged the very definition of the videogame. Essentially it's a tool, an exercise for improving one's mental awareness through DS-specific mini-games and gentle persuasion from the disembodied head of Prof Kawashima. As such, it's difficult to call *Brain Training* a game – it certainly doesn't conform to any preconceived notion of what a videogame should be… but – and it's a crucial but – it has to be 'played'. A curious paradox.

Regardless, there's a reason why the Japanese have gone crazy for what is essentially a meagre selection of mini-games. Quite simply, *Brain Training* converts the results of your efforts into an age rating for your mind. The ideal age is 20, and it's most likely that first-time players will fall some way short (or indeed, over) this perfect milestone. No one likes to be told that they're stupid, so they keep playing. Every day. Perhaps it's to do with humanity's inherent fear of old age and senility. Or perhaps people don't like being laughed at by a disembodied head.



The games themselves are straight from the classroom – basic arithmetic, recognition and spoken word challenges that make great use of the DS's touch screen and microphone – they prove reasonably diverting, but fall someway short when compared to *WarioWare* or *Mario 64*'s equivalents. Maybe that's missing the point of *Brian Training*, after all it's being promoted as a self-improvement tool, but if a videogame is not 'fun', what purpose is there to play it?

And there are plenty of moments where *Brain Training* certainly does not feel like much fun. When straining one's eyes to see which numbers are sliding across the screen, having to memorise a long list of words or count to 120 as quickly as possible doesn't really appeal when put next to *Oblivion*. It appeals even less when it fails to recognise your pronunciation of the word 'blue' or your own unique way of writing 'k', and promptly accuses you of having the brain age of an OAP.

Yet with *Brain Training*, something keeps drawing you back in. When played as intended (in minuscule daily chunks), players can see their brain age gradually improving, and the occasional life-bettering hint from the charismatic Kawashima or unlocked mini-game just makes progression all the more worthwhile.

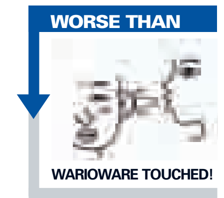
Prof Kawashima's Brain Training: How Old Is Your Brain? may prove to be too much of an ideology clash for some westerners, but its unique Nintendo appeal and our own innate yearning for self-improvement make it a worthwhile little curio. And who says games don't teach you anything?


VERDICT 6/10
INTERESTING AND CLEVER, BUT NOT VERY ENJOYABLE

games™ CONNECTED
EXPANDING THE GAMEPLAY
MATHS CHALLENGE: *Brain Training* allows up to 15 players to participate in a mega mathematics marathon via DS download play. Sounds like hell, doesn't it?

BETTER THAN

THE RUB RABBITS!

WORSE THAN

WARIOWARE TOUCHED!

URBAN CHAOS: RIOT RESPONSE

IT'S LIKE POLICE ACADEMY BUT WITH EXCRUCIATING DEATH

FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

WE PREDICT A RIOT: The riot shield is your own movable cover, and doubles as a tool for bashing criminals' faces.

SLO-MO: Particularly impressive kills are replayed in slow motion. Twice if you're lucky.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PS2

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Eidos

DEVELOPER
Rocksteady Studios

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
30 June

PLAYERS
1 (2-8 Online)

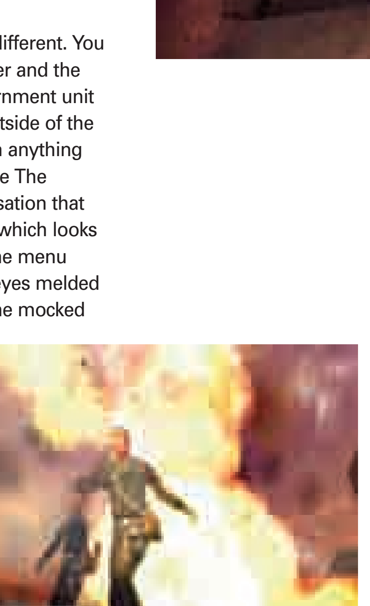
That the events of September 11 would resonate in all areas of life was never in doubt. What was discussed was our ability to talk about it, both directly to each other and, in a more universal sense, through our art. Dramatising a tragedy such as this for the purposes of mass consumption or entertainment is an ambiguous – not to mention ambitious – undertaking, at once necessary for the world to accept and understand the event, but also a tactless risk should the end product not treat the subject with due care and attention – compare Paul Greengrass' *Bloody Sunday* with Michael Bay's *Pearl Harbor* and you'll understand what we mean here.

It is only recently that film and literature have started to directly address the subject – Ian McEwan's novel *Saturday*, Oliver Stone's *World Trade Center* – but media output has been profoundly affected ever since the morning of the attack. Recurring themes of urban paranoia edged with the triumph of the human spirit have saturated our entertainment, reminiscent of the old Dunkirk-spirit only undercut with capitalist guilt, and the knowledge that somehow we are all partly responsible. From Steven Spielberg's *War Of The Worlds* to Bruce Springsteen's *The Rising*, this post-9/11 angst has been rife in all corners of the media. All corners, that is, except videogames. There are several reasons for this including the fact that a high percentage of videogames have always been based around violent themes, but for the most part games have shown little of the emotional fallout.

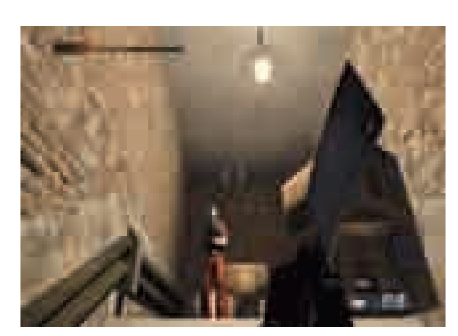
Urban Chaos: Riot Response is different. You play Nick Mason, a former soldier and the leader of a controversial new government unit called T-Zero. Operating entirely outside of the law and far closer to vigilantes than anything else, T-Zero was assembled to battle The Burners, a growing terrorist organisation that is laying siege to an American city which looks suspiciously like New York. From the menu screen image of Mason's tortured eyes melded with a fluttering American flag to the mocked



Use your Taser gun to make non-lethal arrests.



The enemy gang are called The Burners. There's a clue in the title.



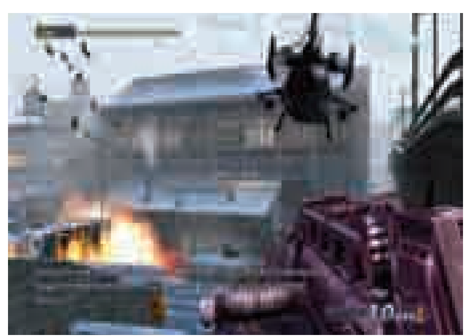
There are a variety of weapons, from meat cleavers to nail bombs.



Medals are awarded for reaching various targets, including headshots.

GIVE THE MAN A MEDAL

Key to the success of any first-person shooter is the desire for repeated play, and *Urban Chaos: Riot Response* caters to this with a bonus system. Each level has set criteria that, should you meet them, will see you receiving a medal. These rewards unlock new weapons, sub-missions and multi-player features, and are awarded for successful headshots, non-violent arrests, completing without being killed, and capturing gang bosses. While such systems are fairly common, they are by no means standard practice, and for a relatively marginal release like *Riot Response* they constitute yet another reason to consider buying the game.



up newscasts that introduce each level, from the hordes of faceless, bomb-loving enemies to the heavy-handed back-slapping for the Fire, Ambulance and Police services, *Riot Response* reeks of post-9/11 angst. In fact, it positively drips with the stuff.

Videogames have rarely been exalted as an effective platform for sociological debate, and, true to form, *Riot Response* keeps 9/11 as subtext. If this was a deliberate choice on behalf of the developers it was a wise one as the excessively violent nature of the game – deaths are replayed in slow-motion, head shots are rewarded, your Taser can be used to burn people alive as well as bring them in unharmed – occasionally jars with the title's land-of-the-free mentality.

To prevent *Riot Response's* morals becoming too conflicted, T-Zero is presented as a controversial unit with pre-level news broadcasts that make much of the public's concerns over the freedom to maim and destroy. This is just one of several nice touches that manage to distinguish the game from the mindless slaughter rife in other titles. The most notable of these innovations is your ability to use a riot shield. Pulling the left trigger allows you to use it as a barrier while pulling the right will smash it into the enemy's face. It could have been little more than a token addition, but levels are designed with its uses in mind, and the shield quickly becomes vital to your progress and, most importantly, fun and satisfying to use.

Urban Chaos: Riot Response is not without its flaws, of course, but they are not strong or glaring enough to eclipse its positive qualities. The narrative requires that the action should take place in one city, and that the majority of the missions occur within the same neighbourhood. Repetition is somewhat inevitable, especially given that all of the gang members are shirtless and wear the same mask, but additional elements such as time limits, civilians to protect, and the chance to mow down the enemy from a helicopter provide sufficient variety to prevent this from becoming a noticeable problem.

Despite the overriding feeling of contrivance and, for the want of a better term, cheesiness, *Urban Chaos: Riot Response* is an extremely well turned out product. The graphics are surprisingly impressive, movement is smooth and, despite the occasional feeling of repetition, the action is constantly fast-paced and compelling. Bullet for bullet, *Black* still remains the best of the current crop of first-person shooters, but *Riot Response's* multi-player option goes some way to make up for its handful of niggles, and provides that extra element of longevity that was *Black's* major downfall. If you can stand the chest-thumping patriotism and delight in artfully painful death, you could do an awful lot worse than *Urban Chaos: Riot Response*. God bless America!

VERDICT 7/10
A DECENT EFFORT LIFTED BY INNOVATIVE TOUCHES

FAQs

Q. DO YOU HAVE A SHIELD?
Well, you wouldn't be much of a riot cop without one.

Q. IS IT BULLET PROOF?
Bullet proof, chainsaw proof, meat-cleaver proof, Molotov cocktail proof, rocket launcher proof…

Q. ROCKET LAUNCHER PROOF?
Well, we never said it was the most realistic game in the world. It's either that or fiery death.



CITY LIFE

INTEGRATE OR RULE WITH AN IRON FIST? IT'S YOUR CHOICE…

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
France

PUBLISHER
Monte Cristo

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£34.99

RELEASE
12 May

PLAYERS
1

MIN SPEC:
Windows 2000/ME/XP, 1.5 GHz processor, 256MB RAM, 64MB 3D graphics card, 2GB free hard disk space, DirectX 9.0c or higher

There's probably something deeply philosophical in the fact that the life of your average gamer tends to involve thousands upon thousands of explicit virtual deaths, and yet it's titles such as *City Life* that provoke the greatest sense of social unease. What on the surface appears to be a pretty standard city-building sim is in fact the scene of an ongoing class war that, while the developer is at pains to declare it entirely fictitious, often leaves players lending a helping hand to only the most profitable areas of their newly founded societies.

According to the game's classification, there are six types of people that might be attracted to a metropolitan life. First is the Have-Nots – struggling, low-income individuals living in squat-like accommodation. Branching out to the (presumably) political right of this bottom rung are the Blue Collar – moderate earners with traditional values. To the left lie the Fringes – free-thinking artistic types, fond of psychedelic love wagons. Above the Blue Collar sit the Suits who have the same social outlook as their spiritual brothers but desire a more affluent life. Similarly, the Radical Chic sub-group share much with the Fringe but consider themselves more progressive and ambitious. Finally, the Elite rise up as the highest earners and most refined section of any metropolis they are the most profitable kind of individuals to attract to any wannabe capital. The game presents us with one sad fact of life: sections of society most remote from each other, both politically and financially, don't get on. Making them cohabit in (relative) peace while maintaining steady growth is the bulk of *City Life*'s challenge, distinguishing it enough to stop you seeing *Sims*.



When making the first tentative steps into urban macro management, you'll only have the resources to attract the bog-standard Fringes and Blue Collars. Only being able to build generic housing sectors, keeping warring factions apart becomes a matter of positioning a raft of sub-group-specific businesses and leisure pursuits in encampments. As populations expand, access will be granted to a number of larger businesses that, together with good quality education, will allow residents to rise up the social ladder (and bring more tax dollars to City Hall). It has to be said, though, that you're a long time cultivating a basic, burgeoning populace before there's the financial clout to start farming your greatest earners, and even then the pace struggles above pedestrian. Also, the standard news window seems to care little whether what it's telling you is needed can actually

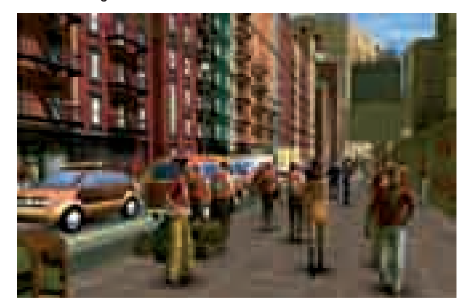
FAQs

Q. ANY VARIETY ON OFFER?
Well, there's an in-game terrain editor if you don't like building around the sea.

Q. DO ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS AFFECT GAMEPLAY?
Yes. Fires spread more rapidly in drier climates, while mountainous land is worthless.

Q. WILL IT LAST?
A few months, certainly. Five different environment types house 22 maps.

The Fringes live in colourful apartments, watching Friends and listening to their iPods.

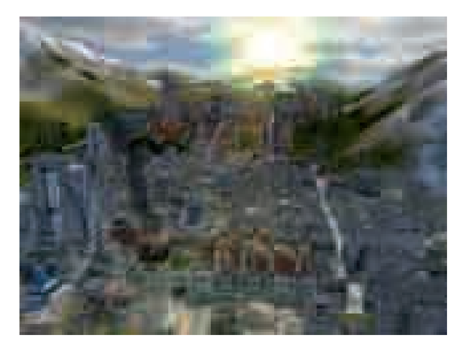




There's nothing quite like the satisfaction of checking out the movie-going tastes in a city you recently founded.

I PLACATE A RIOT

Social conflict will usually be announced by the appearance of a large fire. In this situation, there are a number of options. Most peacefully, you can choose to build an annexe of City Hall in the required area to run social harmony classes. Less expensively, a police station might provide a better watch over the unruly. Alternatively, you may wish to choose the troubled site as the location of your city's first SWAT headquarters and watch the batons fly. All well and good, but there's often no lasting effect of urban unrest due to the old 'construct a fire station then destroy it' trick.



Fringe blocks surrounded by Blue Collar might be ablaze before too long.



While only a select few can expect visuals of this quality, mortals need only to remove buildings' shadows.

be done; it's like watching sports highlights when you already know the score. For hours on end.

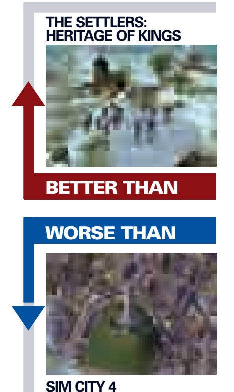
City Life's portrayal of itself as a semi-tactical outing is somewhat incongruous. Those familiar with virtual mayordom may be struck by an obvious answer to the social conundrum posed – that is to construct each city in the shape of a hexagon with each adjacent segment on friendly terms. However, the game's insistence that certain essential services can only be staffed by one type of inhabitant forces players to lump everyone together and do so every single time a new map is attempted. Therefore, few different approaches to city construction are actually available, marking a categorical shift from game to sandbox, one that intermittently gives way to list-checking. The only real decision left to be made in this situation is how to deal with trouble on its inevitable arrival.

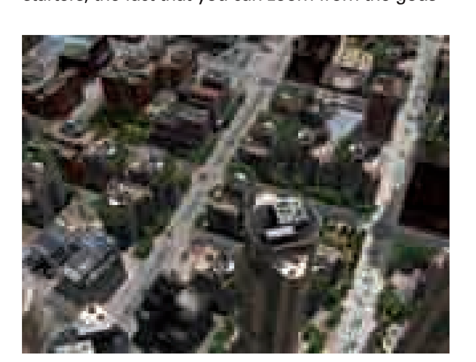
Regardless of how much *City Life*'s stated aim is at odds with itself, there's still lots to praise. For starters, the fact that you can zoom from the gods right down to a first-person view of any neglected back alley – should you so wish – creates a feeling of connection despite the generic way in which your urban environment is constructed. The useful breakdown of the most – and least – profitable buildings in your city helps keep things focused (which sounds like faint praise, but isn't). If all else fails there's the undeniable attraction of megalomania to fall back on. In short, a love of the game might have more to do with fulfilling an individual's desire for ultimate control than the provision of an epic, cerebral challenge.

The plea of distinction *City Life* enters ultimately fails due to tactical elements so facile they might as well not exist, in conjunction with city construction tools that can't match up to other, more single-minded titles. Deciding which genre appeals most from the two on offer here might be a better use of your time.

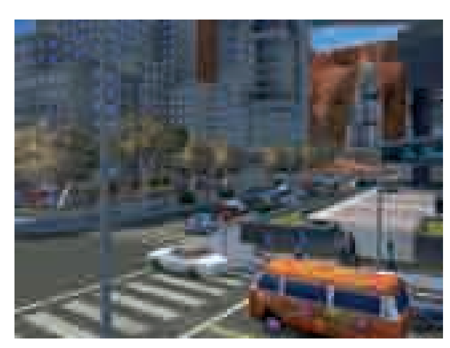


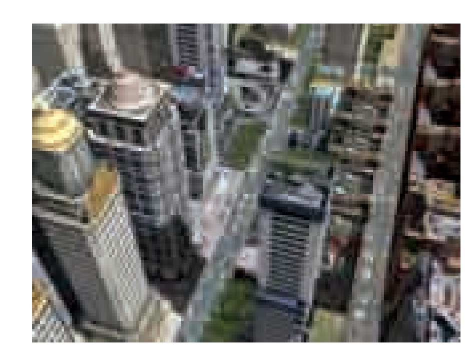
VERDICT 5/10
LIKE PLEASANTLY FLAVOURED CHEWING GUM

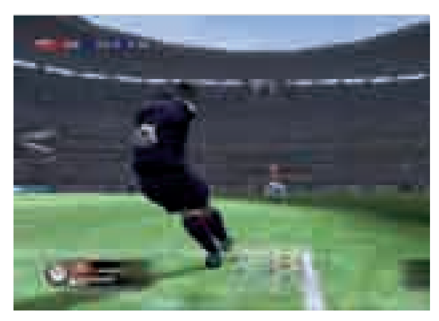




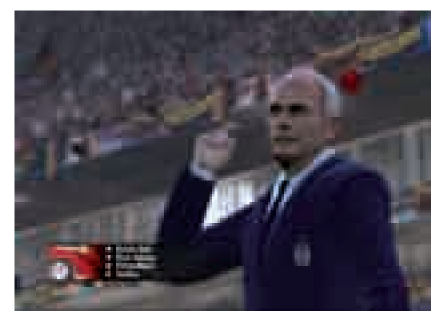
Radical Chics like to lounge on the roofs of their sleek apartment blocks.







The grass initially looks impressive, but once you get playing you'll wonder why it doesn't have a more 'sticky' appearance.



Sven is on hand to look excited or annoyed on the sidelines. Which one is he doing here? Who could say?



Well done for giving the opposition yet another corner from a wide shot, keeper. Thanks a bunch.

games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

THAT'S A FACT: To alleviate the sheer boredom presented during loading screens, EA has added interesting facts about the nations about to play. Perhaps they should spend more time playing *Pro Evo* and less time researching pointless facts.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox 360

ORIGIN
Canada

PUBLISHER
EA Sports

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£49.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-8

FIFA WORLD CUP GERMANY 2006

BEAUTIFUL GAME ON THE OUTSIDE, NOT SO MUCH ON THE INSIDE

The EA fat cats must rub their hands in glee every four years as the World Cup gives them the perfect excuse to peddle an almost identical game to the same people for the same price just months after they did it the last time. Let's not forget the Euro Championships when yet another excuse presents itself. If *FIFA* improved between outings then something could be said for the perpetual releases, but when the same sloppy mess is foisted upon us it gets a little tiresome.

Pro Evo fans will know nothing of paying for the same game twice such is the 'evolution' of that game every year. It actually takes time to get used to each new edition. With *FIFA*, the last time you played it may have been 1996, but pick up this latest version and you'll be bapping them past the keeper in no time, that's how little things have changed in the last decade.

Okay, so the power of the 360 enables possibly the most realistic looking football game yet, but those looks are worth nothing if the gameplay can't keep up. Taking control of a player, the joypad feels like it's covered in treacle; nothing feels fluid. Couple this with inept passing that finds its mark so rarely that you simply give up trying to string together any sort of creative attack. Don't even get us started on the keepers who either don't hold onto the weakest of shots – leaving it open for the opposition to have another pop – or somehow pull off wonder saves for bullet shots that are going wide anyway.

Player animation is solid, and the presentation is on a par with EA's other next-gen sport titles, but the commentary by Clyde Tyldesley and Andy Townsend really lets it down. With the processing power of the 360, you'd expect the commentary to keep up with the game. Sadly, this couldn't be further from the truth. Not only is there an irritating amount of repetition, but it also manages to be just plain wrong in certain instances. Incorrect observations on passages of play are bad enough, but inaccurate scores are unforgivable. It'll keep you entertained, but for all the wrong reasons.

If you own the latest release, why shell out £50? Of course, people will put this at the top of the charts during the World Cup and then it will just disappear becoming worthless for any sort of trade in. Wait for *Pro Evo 6* if you can, and in the meantime be happy with *FIFA 06* if you really must play EA's sim.

VERDICT 3/10

THE GAMEPLAY'S SEVERAL GENERATIONS BEHIND

FIFA 06



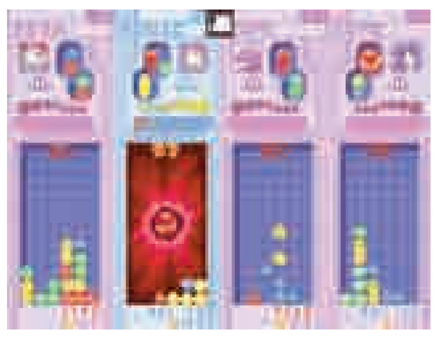
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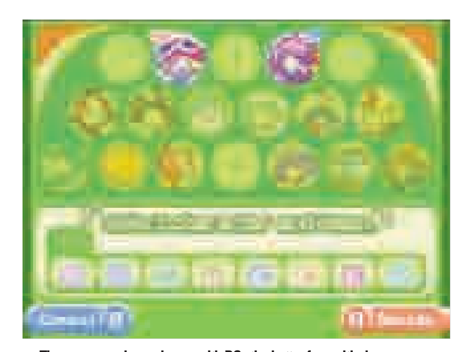
WORSE THAN



PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 5


Look at their eyes. They watch you as you try to chain them. It's scary.


Mayhem. It's still fun though – and you get to beat seven people at once.


The more people you know with DSs the better for multi-player.

PUYO POP FEVER

THE LIGHTER WAY TO ENJOY PUYO

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Nintendo DS

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Sega

DEVELOPER
Sonic Team

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-8



When dealing with puzzle titles on the DS, it's hard not to get the feeling that you're chasing your tail to some level. Thanks to their simplistic nature, titles that grace this genre border on complete far more often than those found elsewhere, so 'improvement' is often a case of the product receiving a mild graphical overhaul or a handful of new modes which inevitably don't quite live up to the original campaign – hence their absence from the first package. The result is a videogame that, although still pleasant and enjoyable to play, feels more than a little stale and wholly regurgitated.

However, you should bear in mind that the introduction of the most recent handhelds have changed this routine. Puzzle titles that appear on these platforms are presenting the bonus of improved accessibility – an element that puzzle games tend to have in large amounts to begin with.





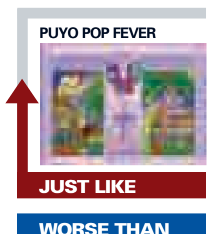
For this reason, *Puyo Pop Fever* has every right to feature on the Nintendo DS and PSP at this late date. It's fair to assume that most gamers have played a version of *Puyo Pop* at some time, and with *Puyo Pop Fever* hitting every platform under the sun last year, many will have seen what this has to offer already, but that doesn't change how well it works.

Linking segments of jelly, creating chains and manipulating opponents in order to build your 'Fever' is equally as enjoyable as it was last time you played, but it somehow seems right that this should be played on the DS. Despite the stylus being rendered useless as soon as you need to rely on any form of skill, playing with the D-pad gives the classic feel that you'd expect, and the fact that you can link together with up to seven other players and engage in a giant *Puyo* battle actually provides a reasonable reason to invest in a fresh copy.

Puyo Pop Fever is a classic formula that works as well today as it ever has. The fact that you've seen it all before will only be irritating if you've already made up your mind that this will be the case. Colourful, fun and with adequate extra Nintendo DS appeal, *Puyo Pop Fever* is a pretty decent purchase that gets even better the more DS-laden friends you have at your disposal.

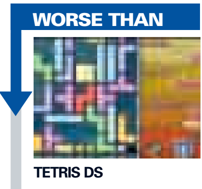


PUYO POP FEVER



JUST LIKE

WORSE THAN



TETRIS DS

SYPHON FILTER: DARK MIRROR

GABE'S BACK ON TOP OF HIS GAME



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PSP

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Sony

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
$39.99

RELEASE
June (US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-8

There's no denying it – the first five minutes of *Syphon Filter: Dark Mirror* are a disappointment. Our two favourite Loganisms have gone, never to return. Gabe, previously the owner of the world's finest forward roll and a bizarre 'Baby Got Back' running animation, has been streamlined and suffocated into a characterless Sam Fisher clone with the personality of a clubbed seal.

After this upsetting re-introduction into Gabriel Logan's world of espionage, life improves greatly. *Dark Mirror* is easily the finest action game for PSP, achieving a familiar mix of stealth and gun-running action with flair. The story is typical sub-Clancy fluff – a terrorist cell is threatening the free world – but narrative has never been *Syphon Filter's* strong point. Logan is a James Bond for the new millennium, and lives for little more than sub-machine guns and gruff conversation.

Gabe has always been more flexible and agile than his good friends Fisher and Snake, so there were understandable worries about his PSP debut. Sony's handheld has already gained the unfortunate reputation of a machine without the capacity to provide solid third-person action. The lack of a second stick has proved a problem time and again, but with *Dark Mirror* Sony seems to have hit the nail on the head. Although a right analogue would be preferable, the combination of an accurate lock on and the use of the face buttons for camera control is more successful than perhaps it should be. It's all down to balance – the finest control systems on earth make their jobs look easy, and (after a brief rough patch) that's how playing *Syphon Filter* feels. Players never have to wrestle with the PSP; everything is simple and streamlined. Camera movement is pleasantly 'untwitchy', and stiff enough for micro accuracy when sniping or peeking around cover, leaving the automatic lock on for running and gunning in close quarters.

The beauty of *Syphon Filter* is its freedom of choice. It allows players to approach any of its myriad set pieces as they see fit. *Dark Mirror* is no different and, in fact, with its *MGS*-style radar and slinky Fisher-style creep, can be played almost exclusively as a stealth title should one have the patience and concentration to do so. Scenery can be pressed up against (or snapped to, to use the parlance of our time) in an unfussy manner – no 'selective cover' here – and targets dispatched in any number of ways, including the return of Logan favourite, the Taser gun. Freedom leads to

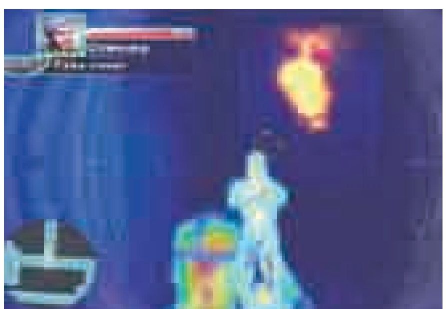
FAQs

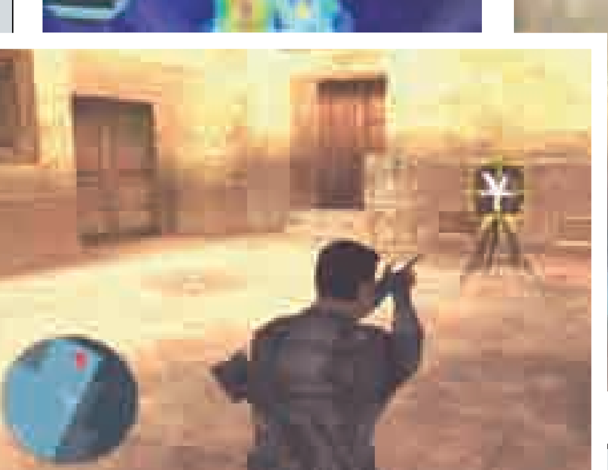
Q. CAN GABE STILL ROLL?
Crushingly, no he can't. The face buttons are now used for the camera control.

Q. BUT HIS ARSE STILL WIGGLES, RIGHT?
No. Everything we once loved about Logan has been stolen.

Q. BUT DOES IT CONTROL OK?
After a few initial worries, it's fine.

Gabe now has access to Sam Fisher-style thermal imaging, very useful for scoping out enemies.







The RTL – not a dodgy German TV channel, but a fancy name for a zip line.

WAR ON TERROR

***Dark Mirror*'s extensive multi-player comes as a welcome inclusion offering a multitude of options and support for up to eight players. Somewhere between *Splinter Cell*'s online espionage and a standard deathmatch, it's a compelling way to spend time with one's PSP. The usual downfall of ad-hoc Wi-Fi gaming nevertheless prevails. The situation where eight PSP owners are all together and all have *Dark Mirror* in their machines is unlikely, but with online play and voice comms support, there's every possibility *Dark Mirror* will be the game that takes Wi-Fi PSP gaming into the mainstream.**



Despite pretty visuals, *Dark Mirror*'s level design is still old fashioned.



Snapping to scenery and popping out to shoot people is immensely satisfying.

expression, which leads to enjoyment. It's a formula more action game developers should heed.

Further adding to *Dark Mirror*'s charms are the impressive visuals. While never reaching *Daxter* levels of vibrancy, the characters and environments have been sculpted from second-gen PSP clay, and it shows. The levels are lit beautifully (especially when illuminated by Logan's torch), spacious and consistent, while the ragdoll physics on fallen enemies drag the game out of its PSOne roots.

Unfortunately, flashy visuals don't disguise that *Dark Mirror*'s level design and mission structure are distinctly antiquated. Although each set piece allows a degree of selection, progress through missions is very linear. Despite valiant attempts at variety, the majority of the gameplay sees Logan taking on a never-ending stream of terrorists, gun in hand. After the delight of the opening missions, the game descends into repetition until the fourth 'episode' where a thrilling protection mission rescues it from potential obsolescence. Combining a *Resident Evil 4*-style 'sit down and shut up' command for your accompaniment, luscious visual treatment and an overbearing volume of enemies, it's possibly the franchise's finest moment to date, and a credit to the dev team. It would have been easy to let the title dive-bomb into an identikit warehouse or docklands mission, like many others.

Dark Mirror is a beacon of light in the mire of PSP action games. Smooth, easy to play and rarely creaking, it's a distinct step up from Sam Fisher's recent portable reccie. For a portable action title, *Syphon Filter* is a benchmark. However, it still lags behind the home console competition. The level structure, story and mission design are stuck in the late Nineties, and extended play can become very tiresome. Nevertheless, a stellar multi-player and strong Campaign mode mark a return to form for Sony's favourite son. If only he could still forward roll…

VERDICT 7/10

BEST ACTION GAME ON PSP, BUT BY NO MEANS PERFECT

SPLINTER CELL ESSENTIALS

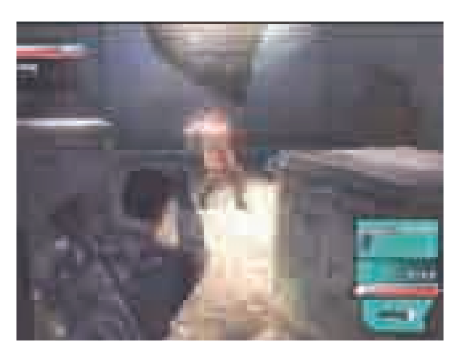


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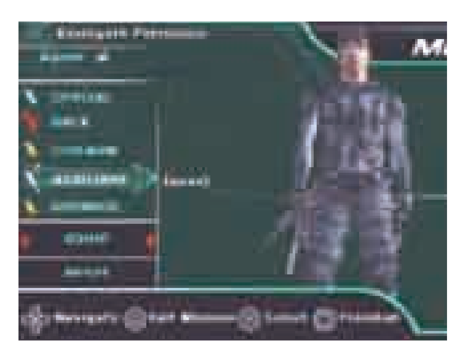
WORSE THAN



SYPHON FILTER



Gameplay is varied and includes fixed gun emplacement duck shoots.



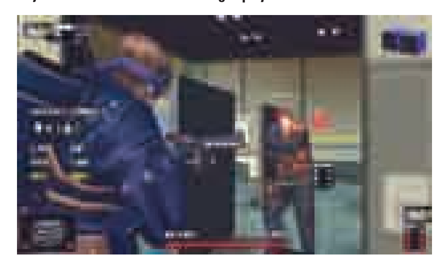
Multi-player allows for complete avatar customisation – crucial online.



Gabe soon learned fire can't be hurt by bullets. He's not the sharpest tool.



Yes, so it's packed with spelling mistakes and other 'Engrish' – but that just makes it all the more amusing to play.

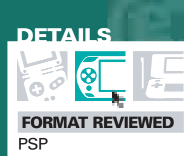


Use a weapon as a weapon, or sacrifice it for movement points? That's all part of the challenge, knowing when each card will come in handy.



Over the original's slightly flat visuals, the cel-shading really helps bring out the game's style… and using the special viewer makes it go all 3D. Oooh.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PSP

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
In-House

DEVELOPER
Backbone

PRICE
$39.99

RELEASE
September
(Jap/US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1

METAL GEAR AC!D 2

THE AC!D… IT BURNS! IT BURNS!

Some people just didn't 'get' *Metal Gear Ac!d*. As far away from the sneak-'em-up gameplay of Hideo Kojima's console-based series as you could possibly get, we can understand why… but that doesn't mean we forgive them for not trying. Beneath the complex system of card-based combat, strategic movement and ridiculous storylines, there was a rather enjoyable game trying to get out – it's just that nobody noticed, because they were all too busy exclaiming 'Cards? CARDS?!' before storming off in a huff. With that in mind then, you'd think that Konami would have done something with the no-surprise-that-it's-appeared sequel, something that would draw in the naysayers while still catering for those that loved the first game.

But it hasn't. Instead, *Metal Gear Ac!d 2* takes everything that the first game had – cards, strategy and… er, more cards – and simply polished the entire formula until it shines like a particularly shiny thing. This is a) good, because the original *Ac!d* was a good example of how card-based strategy games don't necessarily have to be boring and staid, and b) bad, because it means everyone who ignored the game the first time around will probably do exactly the same. Not that we're bothered about the latter, of course; we're so used to ignorant types shunning the good stuff, it washes over us.

So, for those of us still paying attention, things have got better for *Ac!d 2*; not only is the story more conventional (well, slightly… it might not have talking mannequins in it, but it's still bizarre), but there's more of everything. Except any indication of how you actually play – apparently, it's assuming you played the first one. Anyway, with more initial cards available to Snake and a whole host of special extra packs to find, buy and generally earn en route, the ways you can approach each mission and take out each enemy expands exponentially. Now, it's entirely possible to formulate decks around specific play styles – stealth, combat, trap-setting, and so on – which means each person will approach the game differently. Not bad for a simple card strategy game.

That the visuals – now cel-shaded in flavour – have been ramped up considerably is also to be applauded, although that's merely a nice bonus as opposed to being intrinsically important to the game. It's more the subtle touches (nods to other *Metal Gear* games, tongue-in-cheek humour, and so on) that make the game what it is, a combination of something just that little bit different and a typical Kojima game. But then, isn't that what we always expect from him?



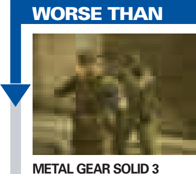


METAL GEAR AC!D

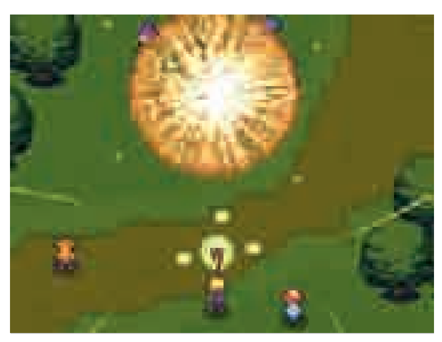


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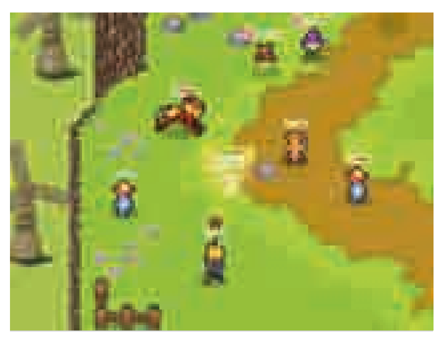
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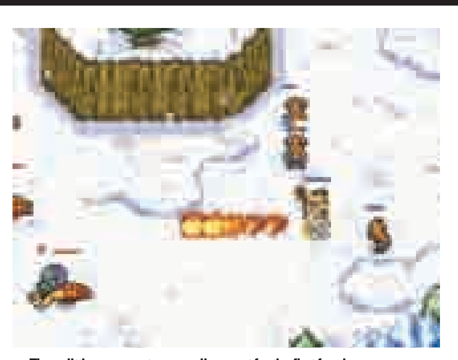
METAL GEAR SOLID 3



It will be quite a while before you can generate explosions like this at the touch of a stylus.



By weakening monsters and capturing them, you can keep them for yourself. Comfortingly familiar, isn't it?



Those little orc monsters are all you get for the first few hours. You will learn to hate them.

LOSTMAGIC

WE FOUND IT. IT WAS BEHIND THE SOFA

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Nintendo DS

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Ubisoft

DEVELOPER
Taito

PRICE
£29.99

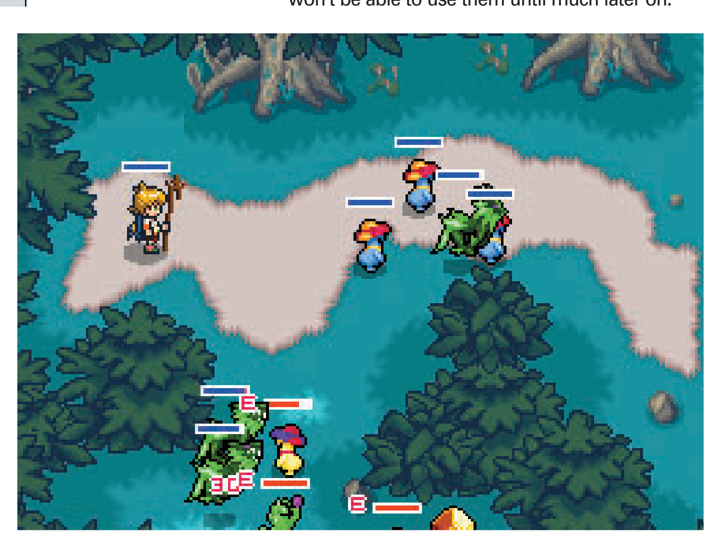
RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2



For a game released on a system whose simplicity is arguably its main selling point, *Lostmagic* is quite complex. It is an RTS RPG with a significant monster-catching element, in which the player casts spells by drawing runes on the touch screen. All the different combinations of rune shapes mean that the game has over 300 spells in total, each with different elemental properties. There's a lot to consider when playing *Lostmagic* – thankfully the game eases you in by restricting you horribly for the first two hours or so of play.

During those first few hours, you can only use single runes (of which there are, ooh, six) and only command one very boring group of orc monsters. You can capture more via a Pokémon-esque method of weakening them before casting a capturing spell (an enchantment which later in the game is revealed to have about 20 varieties for different monsters and situations), but you won't be able to use them until much later on.



Two hours, though, is way too long for an introductory period, and inadvertantly reveals the game's faults (stylus inaccuracy, characters too stupid to walk around walls or stop before wandering into boiling magma, and imperfect unit selection) well before affording you even the slightest glimpse of its merits.

games™ FUSED

BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER

STRATEGY: With units to command and spells to choose from, battling is definitely strategic…

ACTION: …but accurate stylus spellcasting and quick reactions make it feel like an action game.

Those merits, though, are considerable. After that introductory period, *Lostmagic* reveals itself to be an intricate and multi-levelled action-RTS, and once you can start messing around with rune and monster combinations it becomes a very rewarding little game. Beyond the halfway point in the story, you'll be commanding proper armies of well-balanced monster types and casting very complex spells from afar to protect and support them as they battle. It balances careful forethought with fast in-game reactions – formulating and memorising effective spell and monster combos has a lot of satisfaction to it, and the game never loses the joy of discovery due to the sheer volume of spell and monster types that can be uncovered at any point through some chance rune scribbling or apparent mistake in strategy.

As DS RPGs go, *Lostmagic* is the best of a fairly average bunch – its presentation and entirely un-engaging story let it down, but the game itself is very much worth playing after those suffocating first few hours are over. If you do engage with *Lostmagic*, you're likely to get a lot of enjoyment out of it; unfortunately its slow start and lazy graphics are likely to prevent most from ever getting to see how good it can be.



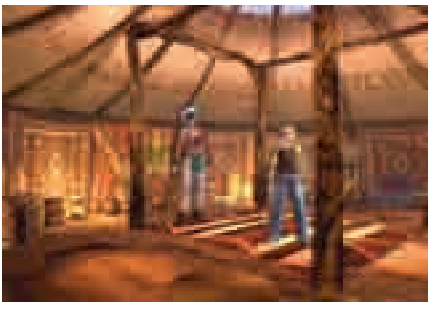
VERDICT 6/10

INNOVATIVE AND DECEPTIVELY COMPLEX, BUT LAZILY MADE

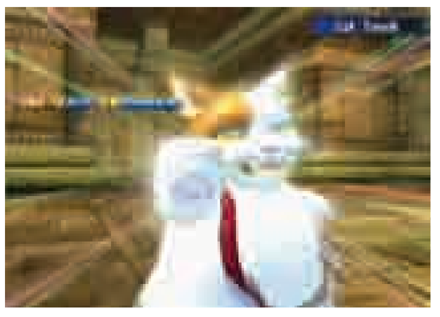




Where you spent the last game wandering around Europe, you'll grace America with your presence in New World. It's still completely mad, though.



Native Americans! See, that's proportional representation.



Mao specialises in cat kung fu of the Way of the Drunken Fist. Yes.

SHADOW HEARTS: FROM THE NEW WORLD

SPIN, SPIN, SPIN THE WHEEL OF JUSTICE

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Xseed Games

DEVELOPER
Aruze Group

PRICE
$49.99

RELEASE
TBA (US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1



With more games than we can count on shop shelves, it's no surprise that the market is getting more competitive by the day. Some companies try plastering game boxes with gushing quotes that the source magazine or website probably never even said. Others go down the 'quirky art' route, confusing punters into picking up their games if only to find out what the hell it is. There are plenty of tricks, but it's a risky business, especially with RPGs whose target market is so much smaller than that of, say, 'Generic Football Game That Isn't Pro Evo 6'. Surely it's better to get the world talking about something so different, so unusual, so ridiculously surreal that you couldn't help but tell the guys in the pub all about it? That seems to be the thinking behind *Shadow Hearts*…

Just when you thought RPGs couldn't get any stranger, Aruze goes and pulls out all the stops with the most bizarre cast a game like this has ever seen. If you thought collecting softcore gay porn to level up abilities in *Covenant* was slightly bizarre, wait until you get your head around this. A bungling South American ninja called Frank; Mao, the giant alcoholic cat who specialises in the Way of the Drunken Fist; wandering mariachi Ricardo, with more weapons hidden in his guitar than in the entire US Army; shape-shifting vampire witch Hilda whose abilities depend on how fat she gets from absorbing calories from enemies. Even the 'normal' characters hide dark secrets that come out in due course, but with such an odd spread of potential party members, it can be hard to decide which four to use. Progression of skills also varies wildly from character to character – Mao must spend rare Cat Coins to film a reference-heavy feline kung fu film to learn new abilities, while native American Natan must trap alien life forms and exchange them for new Gun-Fu moves.

And while you could never call it 'run of the mill' (how many games see you helping a giant talking cat spring Al Capone from Alcatraz?), the battle system is as close as the game gets to sanity. The Judgment Ring system returns to keep battles from becoming the stale hit-X-every-few-seconds fare that similar games suffer from; and it serves its purpose beautifully. As well as the usual status ailments like poison and silence, painful-sounding ring ailments make hitting the appropriate sections in order to attack more difficult – making the ring move at random speed, hiding hit areas or adding false ones really keeps you on your toes in battle. The combo system also returns, letting you use stocked power to

FAQs

Q. SO THERE'S A TALKING CAT?
Damn straight. It's massive, booze-hungry and really good at martial arts too, making it more or less everything we love in one body.

Q. HOW MANY CHARACTERS?
Seven in total, from which you need to choose a party of four. Leaving three of these guys sidelined will make you feel terrible…

Q. HOW IS THE VOICEOVER WORK?
Pretty run of the mill, to be honest. It's never dreadful, but we've seen plenty better too.

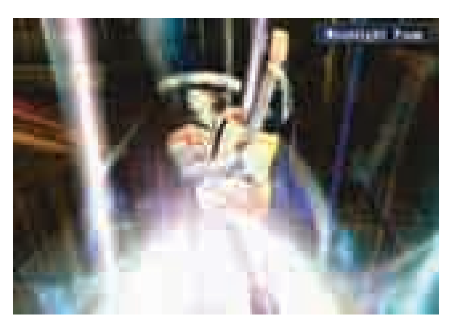




SNAP HAPPY

As a wannabe private investigator, protagonist Johnny likes amateur photography. By snapping an enemy, you get detailed stats on its HP and weaknesses that make battles that much easier to win. In addition, each successful shot becomes a Snap Card, a collectable item that a fair few characters scattered around the world enjoy collecting. By trading snaps with them, you can get hold of rare items or pictures of enemies and bosses that you've yet to encounter, saving you a little time and effort when you finally reach them.

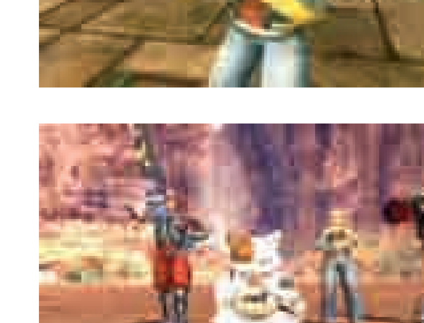




This is what we look like when we play *Guitar Hero*. The lights appear and everything.



The Judgement Ring. Finally, an excuse to shout 'JUDEGEMEEEEENT!' at workmates, á là *Gregory Horror Show*.



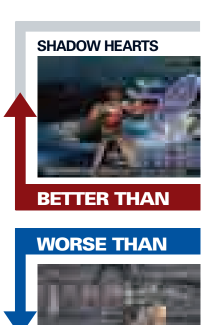
This cat seriously can't get enough whiskey. Never thought we'd hear ourselves say that.

chain moves with allies or act twice in a single turn, and setting up a heavy-hitting combo has rewards beyond the feeling of accomplishment, allowing the fourth attacker to close with a powerful combo magic attack for most damage.

Look beneath the bonkers surface, and *From The New World* is a traditional RPG. Random encounters are infrequent enough to stay on the right side of annoying, dungeon puzzles are quite simple and cash flows like the proverbial wine, so keeping yourself stocked and equipped is easy. Equipping Stellar Charts, each of which can hold a certain amount of spells, covers magic use. What types of spells can be equipped and their levels is determined by slots on the Chart, but this can be tweaked at any shop. It's not as confusing as the game makes it seem, and the system works well once you get your hands on the more useful Charts and spells. To keep matters from getting too traditional, the Judgment Ring comes into play during less obvious parts of the game as well as in battle – store owners can be bartered with through successful ring hits and it won't be long before you really start to master stopping the spinning disc exactly where you want it.

The main issue with *From The New World* is that while the last game built on the original to a great extent, this third episode follows almost directly in the footsteps of its predecessor with little variation. The characters are superb, the story's entertaining and the voice acting is passable, but with the gaming world moving at a crazy rate these days, there's something decidedly unsatisfying about the ever-so-slight improvements that Aruze has made between titles. That's not to say it's a bad game; like *Covenant* before it this is probably as entertaining an RPG as you'll play this generation. Even though you might feel short-changed by this visually basic follow-up, charm and adventurous character design count for more than you might think.









This is a rare attractive moment in *Dirge Of Cerberus*, as everything else is grey. Oh, wait a minute, this is grey too.



Just as *Devil May Cry 2* proved, shooting helicopters in action-adventure games is about as fun as a fractured eye socket.



Now, for the first time ever, both of the sons of Sparda can be yours. Hurrah indeed.

DIRGE OF CERBERUS: FINAL FANTASY VII

STARRY, STARRY NIGHT…

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Square Enix

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
¥5,939

RELEASE
Q4 '06
(Japan: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1



Usually, the anecdotal introduction is a lazy technique for starting a videogame review – a strained attempt to 'set the scene', to pick out the defining moment of a great game and recreate it with words. With *Dirge Of Cerberus: Final Fantasy VII*, though, it's tough to choose any other avenue. To truly understand how bad Square Enix's hugely anticipated spin-off action-adventure truly is, the scene simply needs to be set.

You're pinned down, crouching behind a very grey box as bullets ricochet off the pillar behind you. Seeing the Shinra soldier lurking on a balcony, you carefully edge out to one side of your cover, and snap into first-person aiming mode. Your oversized pistol is equipped with a scope, and one click of the right stick has your sights hovering over your target's cranium. Deep breath, slight adjustment of the crosshair, and 'crack', you pull the trigger. Nothing. The soldier is laughing. He can't be hit because Square Enix decided against collision detection in a board meeting three years ago, and chose not to tell you. Then someone fires a missile at your back you fall down dead, and it's back to the beginning you go. At least your cloak looks nice.

It is astonishing as the PS2 comes to the end of its career, that a title with basic mechanics this flawed could reach the market. Considering *Dirge* is a high-budget offering from a well respected studio, and bears the branding of one of videogaming history's most revered works, it's even worse. At its core, this is a generic third/first-person shooter set in *Final Fantasy VII*'s familiar Japanese steampunk universe. Instead of Cloud, players have control of Vincent Valentine, the androgynous pretty boy with perfectly messy hair and a perfectly messy red cloak. The cut-scenes that break up the action with clockwork regularity suggest he may be blessed with the reflexes and agility of a cat. When the action recommences, it's actually clear he has the flexibility of a broken leg and the grace of Johnny Vegas, drunk, in a china shop. The early comparisons to *Devil May Cry* are limited to the colour of the protagonist's clothing.

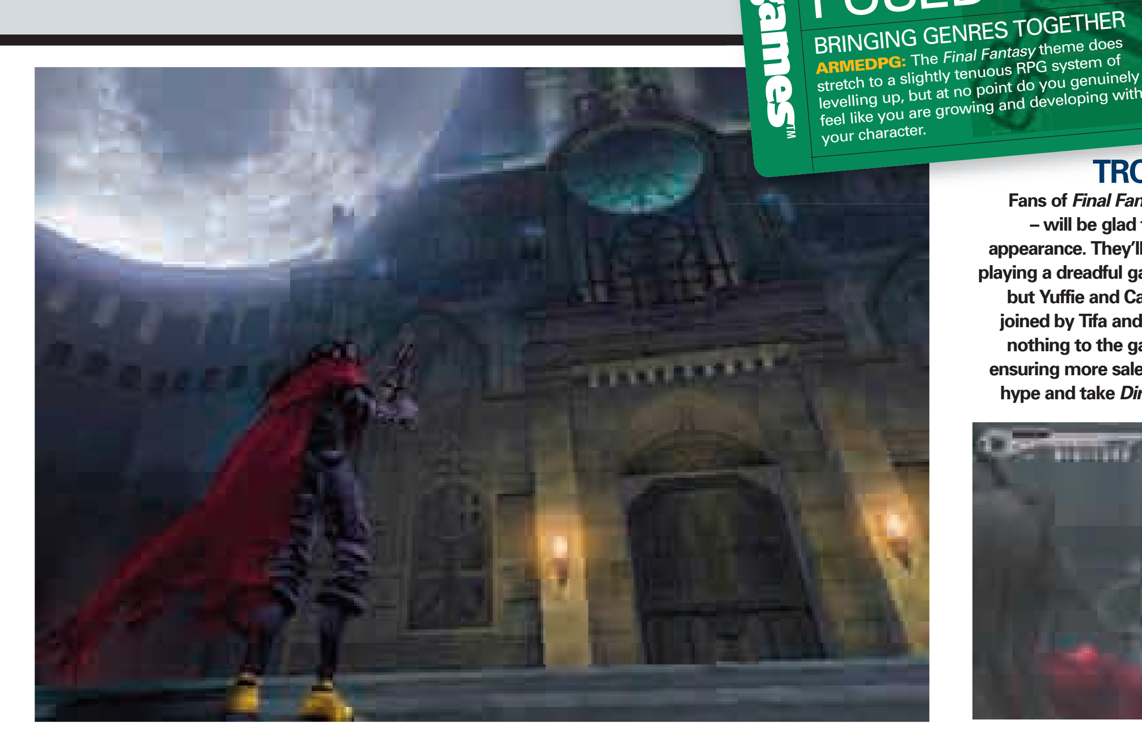
Being that Vincent is not keen on moving with any skill or speed, one may expect the shooting (usually the crux of a shooter, hence the name) to prove much more successful. Alas, the twin-stick aiming is intolerably twitchy, meaning that precision shots are near impossible. Couple

FAQs

Q. IS CLOUD IN IT?
Yes, the original spiky-haired pretty boy does make an appearance.

Q. IS IT A NEAR-UNPLAYABLE MESS?
How'd you guess?

Q. IS VINCENT A VAMPIRE?
It's an unsubstantiated rumour. He was found sleeping in a coffin, after all…



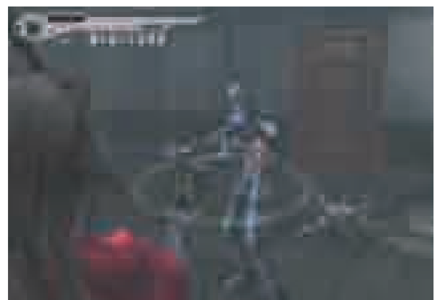
FUSED

BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER

ARMEDPG: The *Final Fantasy* theme does stretch to a slightly tenuous RPG system of levelling up, but at no point do you genuinely feel like you are growing and developing with your character.

TROUBLE AND STRIFE

Fans of *Final Fantasy VII* – all 700 million of them – will be glad to see most of the cast make an appearance. They'll be less pleased, however, to be playing a dreadful game. Valentine is the focal point, but Yuffie and Cait Sith play central roles and are joined by Tifa and even Cloud at points. This adds nothing to the gameplay; it's just another way of ensuring more sales. Hopefully, fans will ignore the hype and take *Dirge* for the horror show that it is.



this with the aforementioned collision detection and you're left with a woefully inept example of the genre. *Dirge* feels like a game from 1998 – so unaware of the advancements in level design, mission structure and gunplay mechanics that it almost lends it a charming naivety. Read 'almost'. All semblance of charm is lost when you lose 300 HP because the game won't let you shoot your enemies. Where's that copy of *Black*?

The misery of trudging through *Dirge Of Cerberus* is compounded by the insipid level design that could be used as a dictionary definition of 'linear'. Cities become featureless mazes of corridors and locked doors; progress never requires more than a clearance of everything that moves, followed by the collection of a keycard left by a fallen foe. *Metal Gear Solid* was mocking this type of lazy game design eight years ago. Clearly not everyone was listening.

The gameplay is so lacking, it's a genuine difficulty to label any one aspect of *Dirge Of Cerberus* as 'redeeming'. With a little digging, though, the gun customisation options prove extensive and play a large part in how your character behaves. For example, equipping a lengthy barrel will slow Valentine from a walk to a near crawl, whereas combining a shotgun and a sniper rifle will allow for a more cautious approach to gameplay. This is all made instantly redundant when play is resumed, as no amount of thoughtful tinkering will matter when dealing with such a shoddy, malfunctioning engine.

Dirge Of Cerberus has proven to be the sum of all our fears: a cynical and poorly crafted cash-in that simultaneously lives off its name



You'd think that aiming a little to the left would help, but it actually won't. Aiming is arbitrary in *Dirge Of Cerberus*.

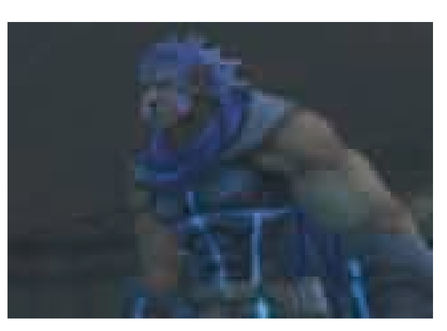
and rides roughshod over it. It is clear that the game's considerable budget has not been spent on anything of substance. No, instead of finely tuned gameplay, we're blessed with beautiful and pricey FMV cut-scenes, each one superbly directed and visually breathtaking. They are on a par with Square's own *Advent Children* movie, and are far more interesting than the game itself.

No doubt, devout *FFVII* fans will lap up Vincent's lacklustre tale, but once the materia-tinted glasses are removed the sad fact remains. If *Dirge Of Cerberus* did not have the words 'Final Fantasy' emblazoned upon its packaging, then no one would look twice. And they shouldn't have to – *Dirge* is an ugly, cynical and tiresome videogame, the likes of which the next generation will hopefully eradicate. A UK release has still not been confirmed, and for once we're pleased.



VERDICT 3/10

A NASTY CASH-IN. BEST LEFT ALONE



It just wouldn't be *Final Fantasy* if there wasn't an oversized muscle-bound freak decked out in blue.

ADVENT RISING

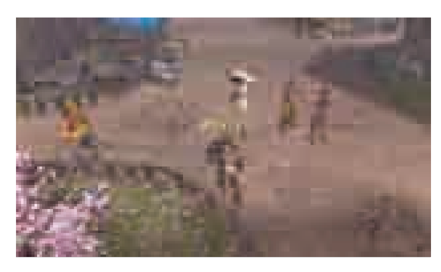


BETTER THAN

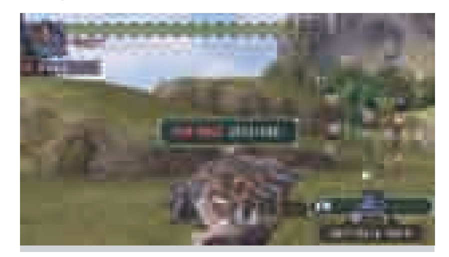
WORSE THAN



DEVIL MAY CRY



The central town is where you get your quests – you also have a farm that you can cultivate on the outskirts.



Killing benign herbivores and then stripping them of meat is essential to the *Monster Hunter* experience. Vegetarians beware.



You won't get to fight anything even remotely like this for at least ten hours. And it will probably punish you. Be warned.

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PSP

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Capcom

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£34.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-4

MONSTER HUNTER: FREEDOM

BUTCHERING HERBIVORES HAS NEVER BEEN SO PORTABLE

Given that the focus of the home console *Monster Hunter* and *Monster Hunter G* games was online playability, it might seem odd that such functionality has been stripped from *Monster Hunter: Freedom*. However, as many of the series' faults lie within the archaic and clumsy online implementation, its omission doesn't harm this handheld version as much as might be expected. You can go out slaying foul beasts with friends via ad-hoc, but as it's unlikely that anyone outside of Japan will have enough *Monster Hunter*-owning friends to put that function to good use, it seems only fair to concentrate on the single-player – and although *Freedom* is not the most immediately appealing game in the world, it has a fair amount to offer.

The game takes quite a while to get going. Structurally, it's very simple: players collect quests in a central town before venturing out into the wilderness which is populated by dinosaur-like monsters. These quests either involve getting a certain number of items or slaying a specific number or type of monster, but there are opportunities to divert momentarily from the aim in order to mine, fish, dig or hunt for items around the landscape, which can then be used to create or improve weapons or armour. Unfortunately, the first 'tier' of missions are tutorials, and it takes around two hours to grind through them before the more interesting tasks. Once you build up weapons and make an impression on the hub town, though, things do pick up considerably – the further you go, the more actual hunter missions you'll acquire, charging you to slay a vast and terrifying dragon rather than collecting three mushrooms from some obscure corner of the map.



For a game supposedly centred on slaying monsters, the combat is surprisingly weak. There are a number of different weapon sets, but few are effective outside of team situations. Controls-wise, things are also a bit dodgy – the lack of a lock-on means that you'll almost always miss your target if it so much as twitches in the wrong direction (the difficult camera doesn't help), and the character's movement is often rather clumsy.

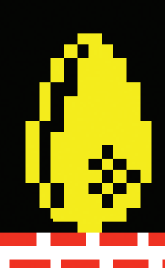
Take the time to get to know it, however, and there's actually more depth to *Monster Hunter* than there might appear to be. It's certainly entertaining for as long as you care to put up with it, but the game is hardly enthralling, especially without online multi-player. It's likely that most will get bored long before the more interesting missions become available. If you've the patience, *Monster Hunter* is worth a look – just don't expect to fall in love with it immediately.

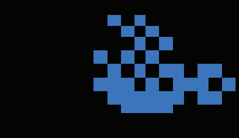


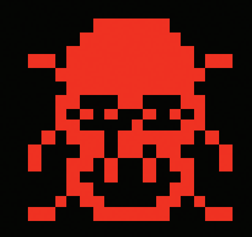



eMag


Ball Ro
Items collected







om East

008

Time 0000 00 44

Seven lives is never enough. **Jet Set Willy, Amstrad [Software Projects] 1985**


eMag


RETRO
MICRO GAMES ACTION
AN IMAGINE PUBLICATION
NO.44 MAY 2006
00p
TOBY GARD
THE CREATOR OF
LARA CROFT SPEAKS
PLUS
RETRO NEWS, THE
ULTIMATE COLLECTION,
WHY DON'T THEY
REMAKE?, GAMES
THAT TIME FORGOT,
RETRO CONTACT,
AND MORE…
GREATEST
GAME EVER
The legendary
Super Bomberman
CAPCOM
REMIXED
20 classic
titles unite
BUYERS' GUIDE
RETRO GEAR
Your complete guide to the classic
consoles and illustrious software

RETRO NEWS

Find out what's going on in the here and now of retro gaming

Posting record profits, Capcom is going great guns at the moment. The software company has a slew of fantastic looking games on the way and is showing the retro community a lot of love.

Don't believe us? Then check out what's on offer: *Breath Of Fire 3, Capcom Classics Collection: Remixed* and *Reloaded, Mega Man: Powered Up*, and *Darkstalkers Chronicle: The Chaos Tower* to name a few, and that's just on the PSP.

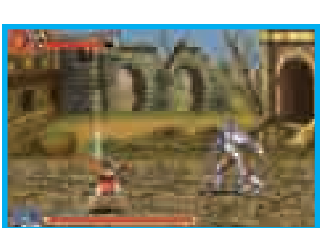
Cynics will accuse Capcom of cashing in on gullible gamers, by milking ageing licences. I'd like to think there's more to it than just money. Take the two compilations *Remixed* and *Reloaded*, for example, while many of the games are firm favourites, Capcom's also included titles that wouldn't normally see the light of day. It's effectively bringing a classic collection of underground titles to a whole new audience.

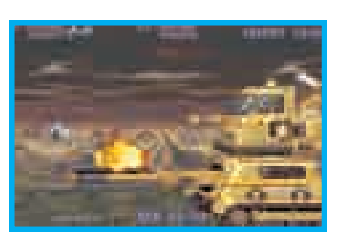
Will it pay off? Who's to say? But I for one am pleased as punch to play titles that you'd otherwise have to find on the net. Let's just hope Sega, Konami and Namco follow suit.



Darran Jones,
Editor – Retro Gamer





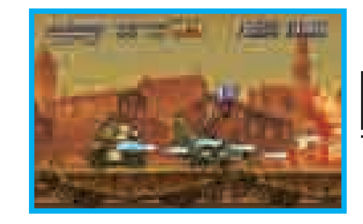


COMPILATION HEAVEN

BRAND NEW COMPILATIONS ON THE WAY FROM CAPCOM AND SNK PLAYMORE

Capcom continues to fly the retro flag with a new announcement for the PSP. Not content with giving us the fantastic *Capcom Classics Collection: Remixed*, it has now revealed that it's hard at work on a second PSP compendium.

Capcom Classics Collection: Reloaded is due to arrive in the US at the end of the year and features 15 new titles, some of which have never appeared outside of the arcades. As usual, the full line-up of games has yet to be announced, but those that Capcom has revealed are very exciting. *Street Fighter II*, *Ghouls 'N' Ghosts* – we reckon *Ghosts 'N' Goblins* will be unlockable on *Ultimate Ghosts 'N' Goblins* – and *Commando* are bound to keep the more casual retro fans happy, while titles such as *Knights Of The Round*, *The King Of Dragons* (both scrolling beat-'em-ups) and the marvellous *Eco Fighters* will instantly appeal to the hardcore.



It's *Eco Fighters* that we're looking forward to most as the environmentally friendly shooter has never made it to a home machine, portable or otherwise, but it will also be interesting to return to *Knights Of The Round* and *King Of Dragons* as both SNES conversions were rather lacking. In a perfect world, Capcom would also announce *Alien Vs Predator*, *The Punisher*, *Willow* and *Dungeons & Dragons: Shadow Over Mystara*, but due to licence rights we're unlikely to see them again on home systems.

Other interesting additions to *Reloaded* include ad hoc wireless play and the ability to earn credits which can then be spent on a slot machine that presents the player with gameplay tips, codes and original art. No developer has been revealed, but we wouldn't be surprised if Digital Eclipse takes care of the conversions again. There's no news of a UK release either, although there's no reason why you shouldn't be playing *Reloaded* by the end of the year.

The second recently announced compilation may not feature as many games as the *Reloaded* compendium, but it'll still be worth a purchase mainly because it contains the entire *Metal Slug* franchise. That's right, SNK Playmore has revealed that the imaginatively named *Metal Slug Collection* will be appearing later this year and will include all six *Slug* games (*Metal Slug 1*, *2*, *X*, *3*, *4* and *5*). While it's great news for PSP owners, those with PS2s may be slightly annoyed, as they'll have had to buy *Metal Slug 3*, *4* and *5* as separate releases.

Of course this isn't the first time the *Slug* games have appeared on Sony's handheld (thanks to the availability of the Neo Geo CD emulator), but now you'll be able to play them without a shred of guilt. Little more information has been announced, but with SNK continuing to push its back catalogue, it'll be interesting to see if something similar gets announced at E3. *King Of Fighters* collection? Yes please.

RETRO COMES HOME

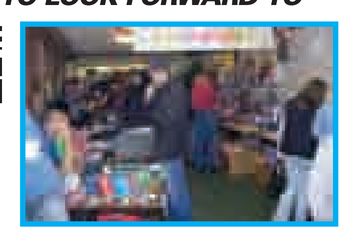
MORE UK RETRO EVENTS TO LOOK FORWARD TO

After last month's announcement about the return of The Retro Ball (now known as Retro Fusion: A Weekend Of Gaming), two more retro events are heading to the UK.

First up is Eurocon 2006, an event now in its seventh year of being. Formed in 1999, previous events have been held in Germany and the Netherlands, so it's great to find that the show is returning to the UK since it last visited in 2001.

Unlike other retro game events, Eurocon is normally very low key and typically features around 30-40 people over the entire weekend, a far cry from the likes of CGEUK or Retro Fusion which normally boast several hundred visitors. Still, the smaller numbers allow for a more close-knit community, the end result being that many of the regulars return year after year after year.

Eurocon is set to take place at the Great Eccleston Village Centre and will fall on the weekend of 27-29 October. Further information can be found at www.sincil.co.uk/eurocon2006.



▲ The UK now plays host to a variety of retro events.

News has also reached games™ Towers of the return of the Game On exhibition which showcases the history of videogame culture. The original show was held at the Barbican Centre in London four years ago and has since gone worldwide. Game On will be setting up camp at the London Science Museum between 1 December and 1 May 2007. For more details visit the website at www.gameonweb.co.uk.

That should be enough retro to keep you busy for a while. See you there.

GOING LIVE

NAMCO'S MASCOT HEADS TO XBOX LIVE ARCADE

Considering the potential of Microsoft's Xbox Live Arcade service, it's upsetting to see how few classic coin-op titles are available for it. Don't get us wrong, *Gauntlet*, *Robotron 2084*, *Smash TV* and *Joust* are great, it's just that we were expecting hits to pop up on a regular basis. Instead we're treated to titles like *Astro Pop* and *Feeding Frenzy* – fun games but not in the same league as classics like *OutRun* and *Street Fighter II* (which still isn't available as we go to press).

Fortunately, that's all set to change as Namco is the latest publisher to announce new titles for Xbox Live's excellent service with *Pac-Man* and *Galaga* out later this year. There's no mention of prices, or whether or not they'll feature upgraded graphics, but we'd be surprised if they end up costing more than 800 Gamerpoints (around £6). While it could be argued that Namco is simply re-hashing the same titles again (we've lost count of how many systems Pac-Man has appeared on), at least its actually releasing stuff.

Let's hope other publishers see fit to follow Midway and Namco's example. We'd kill for an all-new three-player version of *Golden Axe*.



Retro DIARY

Old-school gaming is on the up, so games™ dedicates itself to keeping you up to date with what's going down in the world of retro

JUNE '06

Ultimate Ghosts 'N' Goblins

Date: 02 June **Publisher:** Capcom **Price:** £26.99 **Format:** PSP

It would appear that Capcom has listened to reason, and while the latest instalment of its classic *Ghosts 'N' Goblins* franchise won't be a walk in the park, it should be a lot easier than previous outings. Oh, and did we say it looks pretty amazing as well?

Sensible Soccer

Date: 09 June **Publisher:** Codemasters **Price:** £29.99 **Format:** PSP, PS2, PC, Xbox, DS

We love *Sensible Soccer* – really we do – but we're wondering whether Codemasters might be better off sticking with the original Amiga hit and releasing it on Xbox Live Arcade. The players may look a bit bizarre, and *Pro Evo* may have been leading the football pack for years, but we have little doubt that Mr Hare has a few tricks up his sleeve.

JULY '06

Street Fighter Alpha Anthology

Date: 07 July **Publisher:** Capcom **Price:** £39.99 **Format:** PS2

This latest compilation features all four *Street Fighter Alpha* titles, as well as the excellent *Pocket Fighters*. While all the games have been released on home systems before, this is the first time they've all appeared on one disc. Fans of the series will be very spoiled indeed.

Capcom Classics Collection: Remixed

Date: 14 July **Publisher:** Capcom **Price:** £29.99 **Format:** PSP

We now have this long-awaited PSP compilation in our hands, and boy has the wait been worth it. 21 retro favourites have been squeezed in – many with the bonus of wireless multi-player! Included are some real gems: *1941: Counter Attack*, *Black Tiger*, *Magic Sword* and *Strider*. If you can't wait until July you can always order it from the US.

SEPTEMBER '06

Powerstone Collection

Date: 01 September **Publisher:** Capcom **Price:** £29.99 **Format:** PSP

More lovin' from Capcom, and this time it's two of the greatest Dreamcast games. *Powerstone Collection* will feature both games, new weapons, and features that utilise the PSP to its fullest, plus the ability to play three other players via Wi-Fi (on *Powerstone 2*). Let's hope this means Capcom is considering a brand-new outing for the underrated franchise.

TO BE CONFIRMED '06

Metal Slug Collection

Date: TBA **Publisher:** SNK Playmore **Price:** TBA **Format:** PSP

SNK hasn't revealed what extras will be included, but considering *Metal Slug 3*, *4* and *5* are currently available separately on the PS2 and Xbox, this collection already represents great value for money. Let's hope we see similar franchises from SNK in the future.

If you know of, or are hosting any retro events, please contact the magazine at gamestm@imagine-publishing.co.uk





PORTABLE PERFECTION

Capcom Classics Collection: Remixed could have been the biggest cash-in since US Gold decided to re-release the excruciatingly bad *World Cup* as *World Cup Carnival*. After all, the original *Capcom Classics Collection* proved to be quite a hit when it was released on the PS2 and Xbox late last year, so Capcom could of easily re-hashed it on the PSP with little effort, and see maximum returns. Fortunately for us, Capcom isn't quite as cynical as that – although its flogging of *Street Fighter II* is another matter entirely – and is treating us to a stunning handheld compilation that really is rather special.

For starters, *Remixed* receives the exact same high-quality presentation that made the home console versions so much fun to play. An amazing amount of care and attention has been showered on *Remixed* and the end result is a UMD that's bursting with gorgeous art, music tracks, handy hints and much, much more. Of course, most of these fine extras will need to be unlocked, but even the most basic of gamers should gain access to a few tasty morsels after a few attempts. Then of course, there's the sheer amount of games and different genres that are on offer. While *Remixed* doesn't have as many recognisable names as its bigger brothers (you won't find any *Ghosts 'N' Goblins* or *1942*s here), this in itself isn't actually a bad thing. Indeed, the only games to be repeated from the home versions are *Bionic Commando*, *Final Fight*, *Forgotten Worlds*, *Legendary Wings* and *Section X*, meaning that you have 15 brand-new games (17, really, as *Three Wonders* features a trio of titles).

Granted, some of the titles are rather poor; *Street Fighter* hasn't stood the test of time at all well, and *Avengers*, *Block Block* and *Last Duel* are tedious beyond belief, but then you have delights such as *Mega Twins*, *Strider*, *Black Tiger* and the marvellous *Three Wonders*. Each game is arcade perfect and, in many cases, has never appeared in such a faithful form. Even more obscure titles suck as *Quiz & Dragons* (which has a lot of Americanised questions) prove enjoyable, and you'll quickly realise that *Remixed* offers excellent value for money.

As we've already mentioned, the conversions themselves are faultless, but Digital Eclipse has gone the extra mile to ensure that the games remain as authentic as possible. Each can be viewed in a variety of ratios from 'Original', 'Fit' and 'Stretch', plus all the vertical games have 'Tate' modes included – something that was missing from the Xbox and PS2 versions. This effectively means that you can turn your PSP through 90 degrees and play the games in the same ratio that they appeared in the arcade. Very handy. Add in the fact that each game has fully customisable controls, and *Remixed* reveals itself to be one of the most comprehensive compilations around.

Despite the authenticity of the conversions, and the solid array of games, Capcom's latest compilation still has a few hurdles over which it needs to leap, many of which are no fault of its own. For starters, some of the games are fairly difficult to play on the PSP's D-pad and analogue nub, then there's the fact that many of the games are niche, or obscure titles that the more mainstream gamer wouldn't have experienced before. If you can get past this, you'll discover that just like the recently reviewed *Taito Legends 2*, *Remixed* is a compilation that's full of surprises.



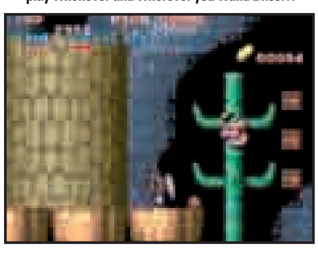
I don't care who the third president of the United States was, just let me kill things…



Wi-Fi enables two players to fight at once in *Final Fight*, but you'll need a second copy of the game.



Strider is a wonderful platformer that you can now play whenever and wherever you want. Bliss…



Format: PSP
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Digital Eclipse
Release: 14 July
Price: £34.99
Games: *1941: Counter Attack, Avengers, Bionic Commando, Black Tiger, Block Block, Captain Commando, Final Fight, Forgotten Worlds, Last Duel, Legendary Wings, Magic Sword, Mega Twins, Quiz & Dragons, Section Z, Side Arms, The Speed Rumbler, Street Fighter, Strider, Three Wonders, Varth*

OVERALL SCORE 88%



A WORLD OF LIGHT, A WORLD OF DARKNESS

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: A LINK TO THE PAST



Release: 1992
Format: SNES
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-House

***The Legend Of Zelda* is a series full of beautiful moments.** Hyrule always felt like a living, breathing world replete with secrets and intrigue. In its day, *Link To The Past* was the biggest, most beautiful game many of us had seen. But there's one moment that sticks out in our minds: the first time Link steps on a mysterious portal and finds himself in the twisted Dark World.

Without the Moon Pearl item, no one could keep their true form in the Dark World, so on their first visit the player was powerless. Standing nearby were two monsters, one kicking the other around the screen, and talking to them revealed that they too had come in search of the Triforce and had ended up trapped in hideous forms in a dark and twisted world.

For a Nintendo game, this was dark stuff. The characters you knew so well had become twisted monsters, and the locations were left derelict. The world of Hyrule had been turned into a horrible place, and the shock of that realisation (and the realisation that the game was twice as big as you'd thought) is something that has stayed with a generation of gamers.

As the player explored the Dark World's secrets and found out how closely it was intertwined with Hyrule, they unearthed a number of deeply affecting sub-plots and set-pieces (the tragic story of the flute boy springs to mind). None, though, quite matched that first step into the Dark World – it unearthed a significant dimension that, until then, you never thought a Nintendo game would have.

GREAT GAME BOSSES



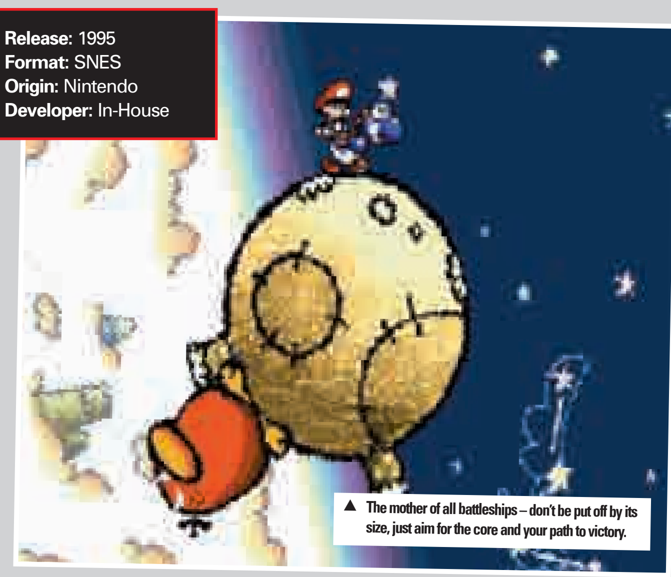
YOSHI'S ISLAND

RAPHAEL THE RAVEN PUTS A WHOLE NEW 'SPIN' ON CHASING BIRDS

Release: 1995
Format: SNES
Origin: Nintendo
Developer: In-House

Throughout Yoshi's first solo adventure, you encountered a number of larger-than-life enemies. This was generally down to Kamek sprinkling regular enemies with magic powder to make them grow (or, in one particular froggy instance, to make you smaller) but Raphael the Raven really trumped them all. At first, Kamek's growth spell only caused the bird to grow a small amount and it seemed that a regular head bounce would see him conquered, but once you were fiercely nudged and hurled onto the moon, Raphael started to look a little more intimidating.

Ultimately, vanquishing Raphael was a fairly straightforward affair. Running around the moon and jumping on pegs in order to harm him was easy, however, the spinning of both the moon and the background as you attempted to do this was not only impressive, it was also rather vomit-inducing. As Raphael got increasingly more hurt he became redder, faster and even more of a damned nuisance. It was soon over though, as three solid hits would send him plummeting back down to earth. Your classic 'style-versus-substance' battle where style clearly emerges victorious.



▲ The mother of all battleships – don't be put off by its size, just aim for the core and your path to victory.

Why Don't They Remake...

SYNDICATE

BULLFROG'S CYBERPUNK MASTERPIECE IS BADLY IN NEED OF AN UPDATE

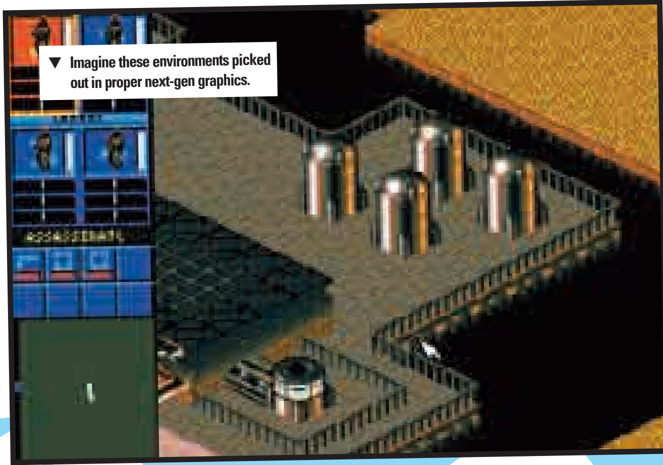
Release: **1993**
Format: **PC/Amiga**
Publisher: **Electronic Arts**
Developer: **Bullfrog**

The influence of Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* in the videogaming sphere is immense. Dystopian near-future urban sprawls, neon-singed city skylines, trench coats, endless rain and Rutger Hauer… none of them would have graced our gaming lives if the 1982 cinematic classic had never seen the light of day (or, indeed, the dark of night).

One of the most overt homages to *Runner* is Bullfrog's superb 1993 RTS title, *Syndicate*. Set in, you guessed it, a near-future dystopic urban wasteland, the game asked players to take control of four mindless, amoral cyborg henchmen and complete objectives for the financial and territorial gain of an 'evil' corporation.

The most interesting of *Syndicate*'s totalitarian regime was its complete ambivalence toward civilian casualties. It neither punished nor rewarded the player, it simply accepted that some players had a vicious streak and would order their borgs to murder. Compare this to modern-day titles such as *GTA* – which simultaneously glorifies and punishes mindless brutality – and you're left with a uniquely adult take on violence.

Controlling borgs was a case of point and click. As with most RTS titles, *Syndicate* remained a 'hands off' affair with the player directing his troops around the cities from afar rather than being in direct control. Opting for this method, *Syndicate* made you feel like part of the corporation rather than one of the cyborgs, and by including management tools like the research and development of new weaponry, Bullfrog's title was heaped just as much in strategy as it was barbarity.


▼ Imagine these environments picked out in proper next-gen graphics.

Way ahead of its time, the game allowed players the freedom to see out objectives however they saw fit. Send a sniper up to a rooftop to cover the rest of your 'men', steal vehicles, use the superb 'persuadatron' to brainwash civilians to attack security forces, or simply pile headlong into the enemy with a mini-gun and a prayer. A sandbox environment 13 years ago? Who'd have thought it?

As compelling as *Syndicate* was, the 2D sprites and Crayola lighting have dated it. The PSOne and PC's *Syndicate Wars* sought to rectify this with a polygonal overhaul, but its muddy visuals and uninspiring gameplay never matched the original's sublime experience. A remake on a mega PC or perhaps the next-gen consoles would be most welcome. As games such as *F.E.A.R.*, *Splinter Cell* and even *Perfect Dark Zero* have proven, the real-time lighting capabilities of modern machines can really add to a game's atmosphere. Imagine stepping into an enormous city, with a towering skyline, 5.1 surround sound rain pelting all around you, the harsh neon bleaching out the perpetual blackness. Okay, so we're still in *Blade Runner* territory, but developers could capture that sense of foreboding so much better with an enhanced audio-visual treatment.

As long as it remained faithful to the original's disregard for human life, that is. The last thing we would want to see is a developer or publisher keen to check off all the boxes after a focus group meeting, and attempt to humanise the central characters or decorate the HUD with 'Wanted' stars. It's the danger when remaking anything precious to people; the chance to rape and pillage something pure is often too great for greedy publishers. Not unlike *Syndicate* itself.


▲ Players would choose their missions from the very green world map.

CLIK-CLAK

***Syndicate* had one of the most satisfying spot effects in gaming history. The pump-action shotgun, and its immortal 'clik-CLAK' sound effect was the stuff of legend. We've searched long and hard, but nothing quite matches its menacing brilliance. Nowadays, these assault shotguns with their soft reloads are ruining our fun. If *Syndicate* is ever remade, we demand the developer steals that effect from the original code.**





CALIFORNIA GAMES [Various Formats] Epyx, 1987 – Original UK Advert





Greatest RETRO Game Ever

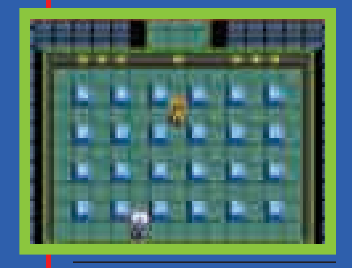
Super Bomberman

Whether you were playing with friends, going solo, or simply pitting your skills against the machine's AI, everyone wanted a taste of Hudson Soft's destructive little mascot when he finally reached the SNES

READY TO RUMBLE

Picking out one amazing *Bomberman* moment is impossible taking into account the many multi-player battles we've had – so we'll limit selection to the instances seen in single-player.

On reaching the arena stage, you fight evil Bombermen to earn the right to face off against Gold Bomberman. He's great. His flames are long and his ability to dodge your efforts to hurt him are incredible; an awesome battle. Man verses machine has never been such a grand experience, and when the friendly Bombermen come in at the end to cheer your victory, you know you've earned it.

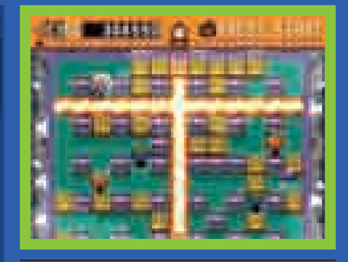


▲ The ultimate contest, head to head with Gold Bomberman. Bring it!

Release: 1993
Format: SNES
Publisher: Hudson Soft
Developer: In-House

There are some rivalries that will simply never die. Rather than listing the many epic battles that our bloody history has presented over the eras, we prefer to rate *Bomberman Battles* as the grandest and most dignified showdowns ever. We're speaking of a series of games that started out in 1985 and is still seeing various incarnations today, so to pick where the best in the series lies should be a tough choice. However, in our view, one title stands head, shoulders and bobble-laden helmet above the rest of the pack.

Super Bomberman was certainly one of the more simple Bomberman affairs. Void of Pretty Bomber Louie and the nonsense that was Charaboms, *Super Bomberman* is still the one of the purest experiences available if you wish to rely on skill alone and not fall into the trap of cheap kills and needless arenas. This 'purity' was arguably the title's biggest charm. Nowadays, if you wish to compete on a level playing field and have a match where victory isn't directed by whoever receives a Power Glove or Remote Bomb power-up first, then you need to take time doctoring the settings and changing the item ratio. *Super Bomberman* brought about no such problems. The design was near flawless with the Normal arena providing everything you'd need for hours of multi-player greatness, with other 'gimmicky' stages – such as Tunnel, Speed and Light – providing alternative but equally challenging game options.



▲ Big blast means easy death. Remember that.



▲ Inspired bosses waited at Stage 8 of each zone.

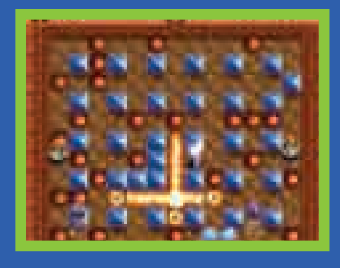
But let's leave the Battle mode for a bit. Whereas more recent offerings have tried to push the *Bomberman* single-player campaigns in a 3D direction – something that has more often than not failed horribly – *Super Bomberman* was of a time where such fancies were not an option, and playing alone and working your way through the six levels was as enjoyable as you could have hoped. It used exactly the same formula as its forerunners but looked far prettier and had a greater host of enemies for you to destroy. Enemy-wise, the best on offer were probably the Silver Floaters who could take about five hits before retiring, and moved with quite astonishing speed. Also worth a mention – through gritted teeth – as they hold a 'special' place in our hearts, are the one-eyed, blue ball things that chased and devoured any bomb that was laid nearby. The name of that place in our hearts? Hateville. It's just right of Ire Town which is also inhabited by the bomb creatures that would uncover the exit – always hidden in a destructible block – almost straight away and then continue to explode right next to it causing extra enemies to spew forth. Awesome.

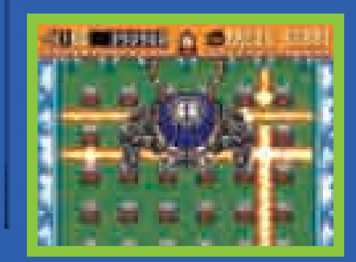


▲ We're really good, so we get to see this screen quite a bit. It still never gets boring, though, not one little bit.

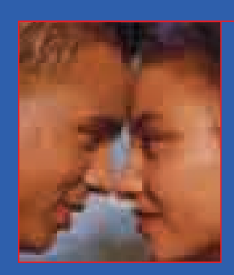
"A VERY RESPECTABLE WAY TO WASTE PLENTY OF HOURS"

That's quite enough of that, though, we're well aware that *Bomberman* is all about the battle, and we're more than a little bored of not talking about it. Even without friends, the Battle mode in *Super Bomberman* was a respectable way to waste plenty of hours, and by whacking all four AI opponents up to Level 10 you could have yourself one hell of a battle. It was when you started this level of play that the real intricacies emerged. Although it was possible for practically anyone to pick up and play this version of *Bomberman* with relative success, mastering all the items and setting some of the more elaborate traps for foes required an awful lot of time. Time, as it turns out, that was well spent. As we mentioned before, we're still frequently greeted by new instalments and additions to the series, so the skills learnt all those years ago are as much in demand today as they were back then. Thanks largely to *Super Bomberman*, our reflexes are honed, our thumb dexterity is at an all-time high and we know exactly whether we have enough time to push that bomb into your face before it explodes. Yup, we're ready for whatever form of *Bomberman Live Arcade* eventually cares to throw at us…



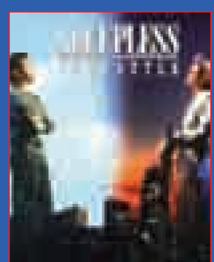


OTHER HIGHLIGHTS OF 1993



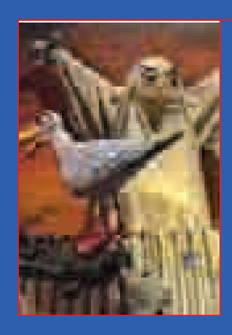
ON THE RADIO

Perhaps the worst thing to ever happen to music, 2 Unlimited reached the top of the charts with a disgrace named *No Limits*. The song simply repeated the word 'no' a lot before launching into an equally poor chorus where they talked nonsense such as 'no mountain too high' just because it rhymed with 'we'll reach for the sky'. One hit wonderment at its very finest.



AT THE MOVIES

Great viewing on 'cuddly' first dates – and also safe to watch with your parents – *Sleepless In Seattle* is one of those films that everyone's seen but nobody really ever wanted to. It's still shown on planes to this very day. We know this because we watched it (again) on a recent flight to the US. It was a sad day for games™, but it's nice to see that the flick still has the ability to induce vomit.



ON THE TELEVISION

It's strange, we can think of few things less scary than cloth, yet the stereotypical ghost tends to use the material as a covering. The only thing to make phantoms less frightening is if they were actually awesome puppets with big mouths – *The Spooks Of Bottle Bay* delivered. Although we don't remember any merchandise, there should have been loads – especially a soundtrack. We sang that theme tune continuously.



▲ You laugh at Blue Bomber's death now, but he'll be hunting you for the rest of your Bomberman career.

an interview with

TOBY

TOMB RAIDER HAS GONE MANY PLACES OVER THE YEARS, BUT IT WAS THE FIRST TITLE IN THE SERIES THAT REALLY BROKE NEW GROUND. TOBY GARD SITS DOWN WITH GAMES™ AND TELLS US EXACTLY WHAT WENT INTO THIS HISTORIC GAME'S CREATION...

Retro Interview

GARD

As game creators go, Toby Gard is somewhat unusual in that he has designed and created just two games during his career. At Core Design, he invented the concept for the immensely successful *Tomb Raider* series, designed its iconic protagonist and was instrumental in the creation of the first and best-selling game in the series. Following that, though, he left to form his own studio, leaving Lara Croft with Core where she would suffer a downward spiral over the coming years as game after sub-standard game was churned out under the lucrative *Tomb Raider* brand. It's a valid question to ask why he left so quickly after the first game's release, despite its enormous success. What forced him to leave his character behind?

There is a little sadness in Gard's answer, but none of the resentment that may have been expected of a man who (as it turns out) effectively had his creation taken away from him. "I didn't like the way they marketed her," he explains. "I didn't like the way that their marketing department wanted to depict her in this sexualised way. The character was supposed to be demure and sexy, but sexy because of who she was, not because her boobs are right up in your face all the time." We quite agree.

Still, now Gard has had the chance to help rescue Lara Croft by acting as a creative consultant for Crystal Dynamics, the development studio responsible for *Tomb Raider: Legend*. "The people here, they really care about the character," he observes having worked with Crystal's 70-strong team for a few months now – quite a contrast from Core's attitude. "I think potentially what happened at Core was that it had become this yearly slog to the point where there wasn't anybody who really cared for the character the way these guys do," muses Gard. Indeed, it's obvious from how *Legend* looks that a formidable amount of time and effort went into its creation, and although Gard didn't join the project until after it had already entered production, his influence can still be felt.

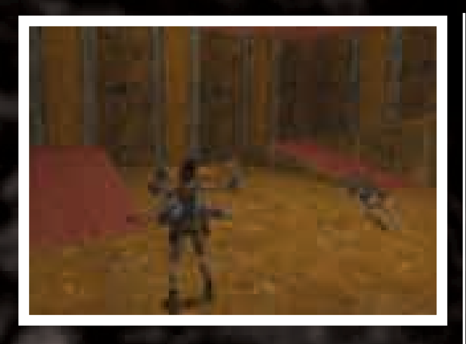
MELODIC IMPACT

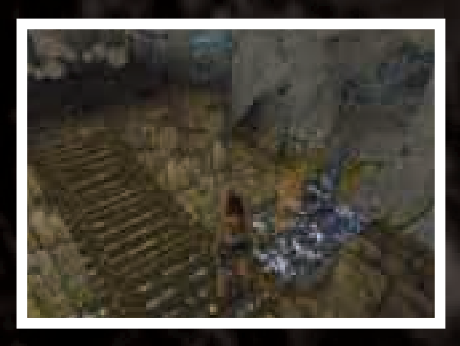
Tomb Raider's music was far from your usual level music of the time. It was atmospheric, sporadic, and very effective. Was that deviation from the norm intentional? "Yeah, at the time, all the Core games had this one rule – you go to the level and then the level music plays repeatedly until you finish the level. That was 'the way' of games at that time," says Gard. "I made the case that it was insane to do that, because when music is on all the time it just becomes horrible and annoying and you have to switch it off."

We couldn't agree with him more; years spent whistling tunes we didn't even like following an extended play session is testament to the power of an incessant tune. "We went with this method where we'd have this super-long ambient track that wasn't really musical but was more of a mood, an atmosphere – dripping sounds and all these other sorts of things – and we would trigger music in certain situations, the same way we'd trigger a door opening. There had been a little bit of people trying to do interactive music before in games, but it was a very new thing, and it worked out pretty well."



▲ The atmospheric music kicks in only at the most appropriate times. Like when you're standing in the jaws of a giant lion.





But we certainly didn't get hold of Toby Gard just in order to talk about *Tomb Raider: Legend*. After all, as he himself asserts, he didn't design it. It's the original *Tomb Raider* for which he is most famous, that first expansive three-dimensional adventure that brought Lara Croft to the world. "It's a bit hard for me to remember now. It was ten years ago," smiles Gard, but that doesn't stop him from giving us a lot of insight into how and why one of the most influential videogames of the Nineties was made.

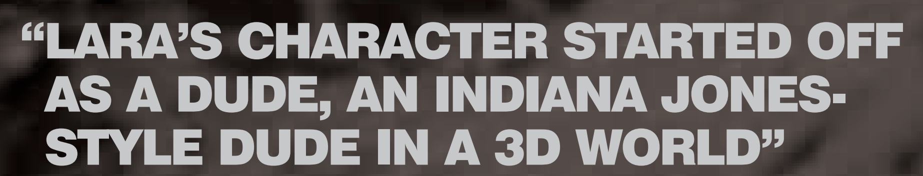
Three-Dimensional Insight

"I suppose I've always had a variety of interests, like writing and drawing and games and animation," says Gard when asked why he decided to get into the games industry in the first place. "When I tried to put all of those things together into one package, it was videogames for which all of those skills were useful. I ended up kind of doing animation as a main thing, that's what I trained as – an artist and an animator – and after I had created a reasonably sized portfolio of work I sent it in to Core Design to see whether or not they were interested in hiring me. And they were, so there you go."

So, like all of the best videogame designers in the industry, Gard was a player of games before he entered the industry. "A game that really blew my mind was *Ultima Underworld*," he remembers. "I thought that was an incredibly well-designed game, and for me it sort of showed exactly where the industry was going. It was so far ahead of its time. It was a 3D RPG with actual stats that changed your physical behaviour, a world that moved and changed around you, superbly designed puzzles and story and content and all sorts of other stuff. Brilliant."

Ultima Online proved to be a very influential game for Gard – it was his drive to produce an immersive three-dimensional game, that led to the *Tomb Raider* concept. "When I arrived at Core they were really still only doing Sega 32X-type games, pre-Saturn work," he explains, "so they really weren't into doing 3D games because they literally didn't have any experience, the programmers weren't really capable of doing it. So I spent a long time at Core working on these non-3D games, but was constantly interested in trying to do something more like *Ultima Underworld*, something that was 3D, where you could really become immersed and involved in the 3D world."

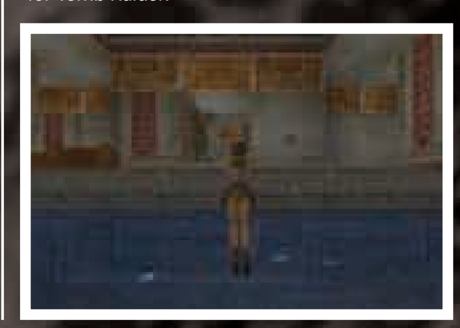
But when did *Tomb Raider* start to actually take form as an idea rather than just as a vague concept? "When I saw *Virtua Fighter* for the first time on the Saturn, realising what would happen if you put that kind of 3D character into *Ultima Underworld* for the whole game blew my mind," recalls Gard. "It must have been on one of the first Saturn kits we got. That was the direction that everyone was trying to achieve with the interactive movies that were failing left and right, because they were all FMV-based. If you did it all real-time, you could create this cinematic three-dimensional real-time experience and it would be just… stunning. And that was it, that was the idea for *Tomb Raider*."



"LARA'S CHARACTER STARTED OFF AS A DUDE, AN INDIANA JONES-STYLE DUDE IN A 3D WORLD"



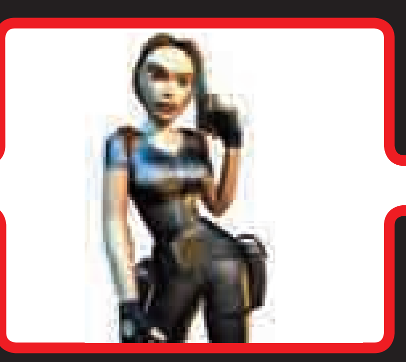




TIMELINE

Lara has appeared on almost every format released in the decade since Toby Gard left the franchise following the first *Tomb Raider*, but as we all know, she was not always met with the rapturous acclaim that greeted her in 1996.







1996–1999

RELEASES: Tomb Raider [1996], Tomb Raider II [1997], Tomb Raider III [1998], Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation [1999]

Lara Croft was at the peak of her popularity when *Tomb Raider II* was released following the widespread acclaim and media attention that the first game received. By the time that *Tomb Raider III* arrived, though, people were beginning to get a little bored of seeing the same game again, and it's here that Lara's reputation began to slip. By the time *The Last Revelation* was released to relatively lukewarm reviews, fans were very worried.

2000–2003

RELEASES: Tomb Raider: Chronicles [2000], Tomb Raider: Curse Of The Sword [2001], Tomb Raider: The Prophecy [2002], Tomb Raider: The Angel Of Darkness [2003]

While a movie was being discussed behind the scenes and Lara became the face of Lucozade, the games went further downhill. Two average handheld titles followed the by-now-desperately-old-fashioned *Chronicles*, and Eidos threw money at the upcoming *Angel Of Darkness* in an attempt to put Lara back in the public eye. When it was released, though, its terrible review scores and lazy construction disappointed everyone.

2004–2006

RELEASES: Lara Croft Tomb Raider: Legend [2006]

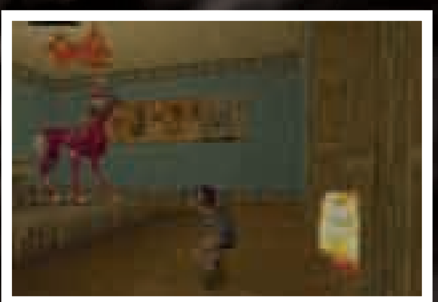
Following *Angel Of Darkness*, by far the worst in the series, Eidos took *Tomb Raider* away from Core Design and gave it to Crystal Dynamics where Toby Gard returned to his famous creation in a primarily advisory capacity. *Tomb Raider: Legend* has had positive review scores so far and, perhaps more than any other entry in the series, captures the spirit of *Tomb Raider* perfectly. The game's inevitable sequel is expected to appear within the next couple of years.

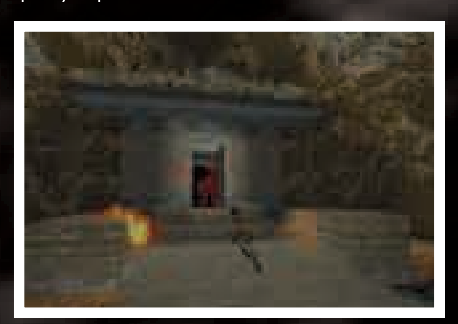
Creating Lara

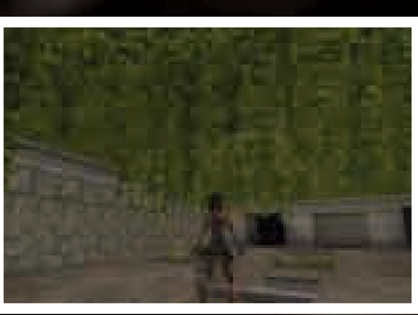
And so Gard and his team embarked upon what would become an extremely long creation process. Originally planned to take eight months, the development time ended up being expanded to 12 and then finally to 18 months before its eventual release. Interestingly, it was the game's development time that prevented it from being a Saturn-exclusive release, as Gard explains. "Core was in an exclusive deal with Saturn even when [*Tomb Raider*] came out. We were developing the Saturn and PlayStation versions simultaneously, but there was some time period that meant that Core wasn't able to bring it out on the PlayStation – it could only have been the Saturn. That was the exclusivity." He grins, "Actually it turned out better for PlayStation owners because there were a lot of bugs in the Saturn version. We found that out after it was released, and we managed to fix and tune up the PlayStation version a little bit before it came out, so it gave us a little bit of polish time…"

Aside from the time it took, though, *Tomb Raider's* creation was relatively pain free. The team had a lot of fun with the game and experimented with a variety of new ideas. "It was all new to be honest with you, we were only a small team and none of us had done anything like it before," says Gard. "Every day was a new challenge. Obviously the coders there were superb to pull off *Tomb Raider* – both of the main programmers on the title had never even made a game before. It was pretty impressive."

Indeed, for such an inexperienced team, the *Tomb Raider* coders managed to make the job much easier for the artists and designers – we thought that creating *Tomb Raider's* complex level environments would have been a hugely challenging aspect of the game, but Gard explains otherwise. "One of the coders created this level-building editor," he told us. "We really didn't have any difficulties with that because it was such a nice flexible tool, and it was so easy for us to save out the file, import it into the game and test it out – see whether or not she could make the jump or whatever. It was a very fast and fluid process for that time – most of the games I'd worked on before didn't really have an editor so much, it was more glued together by the programmers. We had a process where the artists could directly test this









ARRRRRRRRRGH!

Anyone who played *Tomb Raider* will have seen a lot of the game's death sequences. It was a fiendishly difficult game but, hey, at least Toby Gard had fun designing Croft's glorious demises. "I animated all of Lara's deaths, I did the T-Rex killing her and that horrible 'spikes' one – falling on the spikes was particularly painful as I remember. It was a lot of fun actually, as an animator there's nothing more fun than doing the death animations." Slightly sinister, perhaps, but there you go.

Wasn't anyone at Core even slightly concerned that some of them might be too gruesome? Were there some even more crunchy, horrible deaths that never made it into the final game? "There was never a question of changing those sequences!" asserts Gard, laughing. "I just put in whatever I felt like and it went out and it got the rating that it got." Unfortunately neither of us could remember exactly what that rating was.



▲ Oh god! Oh god! She's on fire! She's on fire!

stuff without actually having to go through the programmers, which meant we could really have a fast process."

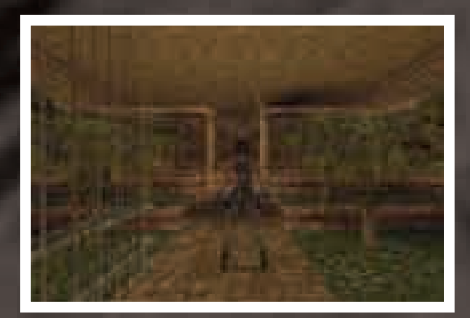
Without that level editor, *Tomb Raider* would have taken even longer to complete. Indeed, it's extraordinary that such an ambitious project got commissioned in the first place, but the Core of the time was far more open to new projects than might have been expected. "They weren't thinking mega blockbuster, they were thinking 'Oh yeah, sounds like a laugh, why not give it a shot', you know, like they did with all the other games," he informs us. "People were pitching games left and right and some of them would be decent and some would be complete failures, but mostly they'd just tick by."

Videogame Superstar

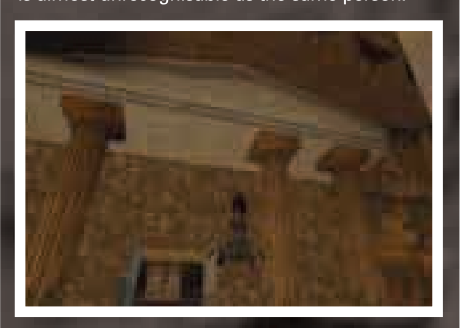
It's not actually the *Tomb Raider* game itself for which the franchise is chiefly remembered, though – it's Lara Croft, that iconic character who later went on to become the only virtual person to be named in *Time* magazine's Most Influential People Of The 20th Century feature. Indeed, she is one of the most (if not the most) famous game characters of all time, and certainly the most celebrated female one.

Where did the motivation behind her come from? "I took inspiration from various places like *Tank Girl* at the time," Gard tells us. "She was a very comic book-based character design, Lara Croft. I looked around at cool characters, but not in any one particular place. It was more a case of sketching many different times with different costumes and different looks until I found something that I liked." The comic book influences are very apparent in the early Lara Croft artwork shown here on these very pages – the angular, polygonal character in between those comic book drawings and *Legend*'s super-realistic protagonist is almost unrecognisable as the same person.

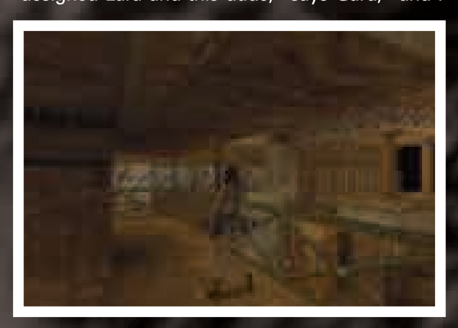
We have heard rumours along the way, though, that suggest that Lara Croft was originally going to be a man – rumours which Gard confirms. "When I very, very first pictured the game of *Tomb* Raider, it was from four drawings, and those four drawings were of a dude, an Indiana Jones-style dude in a 3D world," he says. Why make the change? "Well, when I began to write up the first design document, when I was working out exactly what the character design would be, there was a time when we were thinking about being able to choose from more than one. And so I designed a male and a female character. And then I realised that with the level of storytelling – I was going for a cinematic, movie-directed style – we would end up having to do double the amount of cinematic work, and that was somewhat more ambitious than we wanted to do." So there was absolutely nothing calculated about putting a female protagonist into the game? "I'd already designed Lara and this dude," says Gard, "and I



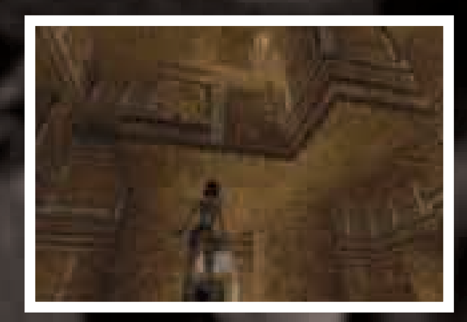
▲ The levels were not exclusively subterranean.



▲ The first game's architectural influences included Egypt and the east.



▲ You wonder why they don't close these places off, really.



Getting down from up there probably took about three hours of dying.



She seldom actually finds anything down there.

liked Lara more than I liked the dude, so she was the winner. That was that."

And so Lara Croft was not designed with the sex-symbol image that she eventually became in mind – indeed, that image was pretty much the opposite of what Gard wanted. The character herself, though, was carefully considered, as is indicated by the amount of background information on her origins and personality that was worked into the game. "I think that particular aspect of her makes her interesting," agrees Gard. "She's just different, that made her even more different from the usual type of game characters around… it's not just the fact that she's a girl, it's the fact that she's an aristocrat, and that was a bit, y'know, strange. I think that people are attracted to something that isn't the same as what they've always seen before."

Cinematic Influences

Given that the *Tomb Raider* game idea was formulated from a cinematic concept, we wanted to know what Gard's cinematic influences were. As it turns out, they can both be seen most apparently in the combat, and not in the FMV sequences. "There was a mixture of two influences," Gard explains. "One was the John Woo movies – I'd seen *Hard Boiled* and I wanted to get that in, I was so excited about that film – at the time it was just insane. I wanted to have that kind of dual-pistol insanity going on, with leaping and shooting and stuff. Obviously it was quite a long way less than that in the end, but that was what was pushing the combat forward." And the other filmic influence? "The other was *Aeon Flux*. In one of the shorts, she's running around with Uzis, mowing down hundreds of people – and that was pretty exciting, I thought. So for me, it had to be that Lara was a dual-wielding action star, and that became an integral part of the whole costume." And from there it became an integral part of the gameplay – Lara Croft remains an all-action heroine today, and has even starred in two action films herself.

Gard was delighted with the *Tomb Raider* films. "The fact that she's in a Hollywood film, that's pretty incredible. I was pleased about that," he says, smiling. We ask him if he was pleased with the selection of actress, and he laughs. "Yeah, superb!" Seeing *Tomb Raider* as a film, though, reminds Gard of the cinematic piece that the first game was conceived as. "The original design of it was all about having this dynamic direction going on in it, these camera angles changing and cutting in close on actions and all this other stuff, and that totally fell by the wayside pretty early on because of the sheer complexity of it. No one's really done what I was originally imagining for *Tomb Raider*." He thinks for a moment. "I'm not even sure that it's really viable, now I think about it."

The success of *Tomb Raider* – and Lara – was a complete surprise for Gard, and for Core. You may have noticed that much of the artwork on these pages is from *Tomb Raider II*, as that's where Lara's real celebrity status started. Sadly, it was also the start of the series' decline, but none of that was Gard's fault. "It was all a big surprise for everyone," he says, talking about Lara's rise to fame. "I knew it was good, I knew that what we were making was dynamite, but I didn't expect it to be like that. I mean, going to number one and staying there for months on end was pretty insane." What does Gard think was the secret of its success? "Lots of different things, I suppose. It had a really unique character, it had some really memorable moments, it had some pretty clever level design, and it had a good solid platforming mechanic. It was based in the whole history scenario, which I felt was something that was very engaging. And it had a good story."

Evolution, Not Expansion

Tomb Raider was real proof if ever proof were needed that something different does appeal – and does, indeed, sell. Lara Croft was embraced by the gaming community as both something of a feminist icon as well as a sex symbol. On either side of the gender divide, her character remains respected – with *Tomb Raider: Legend* now on general release, Lara Croft appears to have discovered her fans again. "It's nice to see that people still have that warm place in their hearts for Lara," says Gard.

So what does Toby Gard think is next for Lara Croft and, indeed, for himself? How does being reunited with his highly successful creation feel? "I never thought it was going to happen," he admits. "Lara has a long way to go now that we've done *Legend*. We can do what Core didn't, which is to seriously push and expand the franchise – to evolve Lara. The problem before was that it all became very stagnant, every *Tomb Raider* game was essentially the same but with different graphics or the odd new costume or maybe vehicle. In the future, they're going to be moving Lara to new spaces, with new types of gameplay, I hope. That's what's needed, you know? Evolution." Quite. Ten years might be a long time to spend away from your creation, but it seems that Gard is glad to be back.

"THE FACT THAT SHE'S IN A HOLLYWOOD FILM, THAT'S PRETTY INCREDIBLE. I WAS PLEASED ABOUT THAT"

GAMES THAT TIME FORGOT

WE ATTEMPT TO REWRITE THE HISTORY BOOKS BY SALUTING THOSE CLASSIC GAMES THAT HAVE FALLEN BY THE WAYSIDE

SPACE STATION SILICON VALLEY

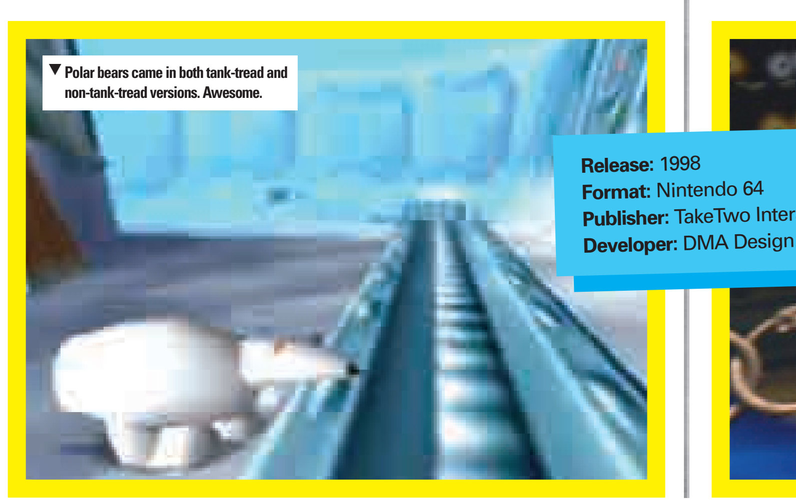
WEIRD, A BIT BROKEN, AND UTTERLY WONDERFUL

From the Scottish studio that became Rockstar North, *Space Station Silicon Valley* was an exceptional game that never got the attention it deserved – possibly because it was a bit broken. It was rushed onto shelves in 1998 because DMA Design wanted to concentrate on newer platforms, and so it was released with a selection of entertaining bugs. But rather than break the game, these quirks made it better – they made it one of the most flexible and unusual titles on the N64.

The space station itself was split into four eco-systems full of animals. Sadly, the station broke from orbit and was abandoned, meaning that its biomechanical inhabitants evolved and mutated into a bewildering array of creatures. The player took control of Evo, a robot whose owner crash-landed on the planet. Although Evo was smart enough to eject, his robot body broke into bits – only his brain microchip survived. To endure the harsh conditions, the player had to inhabit the bodies of each of the space station's hundred-odd species thoughout the game. It was this boundless variety that made *Space Station Silicon Valley* so brilliant.

Though you began levels with a useless sheep or tiny mouse, before long you learned to covet foxes, killer rats, penguins, boxing kangaroos and other such impressive creatures, and began thinking up schemes to murder them so you could take over their bodies. Missions usually guided you in the right direction, but possibly the best thing about *Space Station Silicon Valley* was that there were always more ways than one to massacre animals. Because the game was so loosely designed, the intended method wasn't always clear, leaving the player free to experiment – we remember missing the switch that lowered a platform, and building a mountain of dead creatures to get to it instead, placing a jumping sheep at the top of the tower in the hope that it would reach. And it did. We remember luring rams into pits that they weren't meant to fall into before letting out some aggression on his flock of sheep, and then having to restart after discovering that we actually needed them – still, it was worth it. Can't get past one area because of the giant bear, and keep having to creep past the rocket dog at the other end of the level? Lure them toward each other and watch them fight. Either way you'll end up with a powerful corpse to control. There were no restrictions in Silicon Valley – it was like a giant, murderous playground, and watching how the game world and animals interacted with each other was fascinating.

Also standout was its humour. Apart from the cartoon-violence amusement of finding new and inventive ways to kill beasties, the character and plot were infused with a uniquely British dark humour unlike anything else. The game began with a love scene between a robot dog and a sheep called Fluffy – rudely interrupted by Evo and Dan's spaceship crashing into the happy couple. Mission complete lines like 'Well done, you turned on the big computer thing!' and endlessly morbid, hilarious or tongue-in-cheek objectives kept the tone light-hearted. From beginning to end, the game exuded character, something sorely lacking from most games. Indeed, we've not seen character like this since. It's no wonder we remember it so well – it's a crying shame that the rest of the world seems to have forgotten it ever existed.

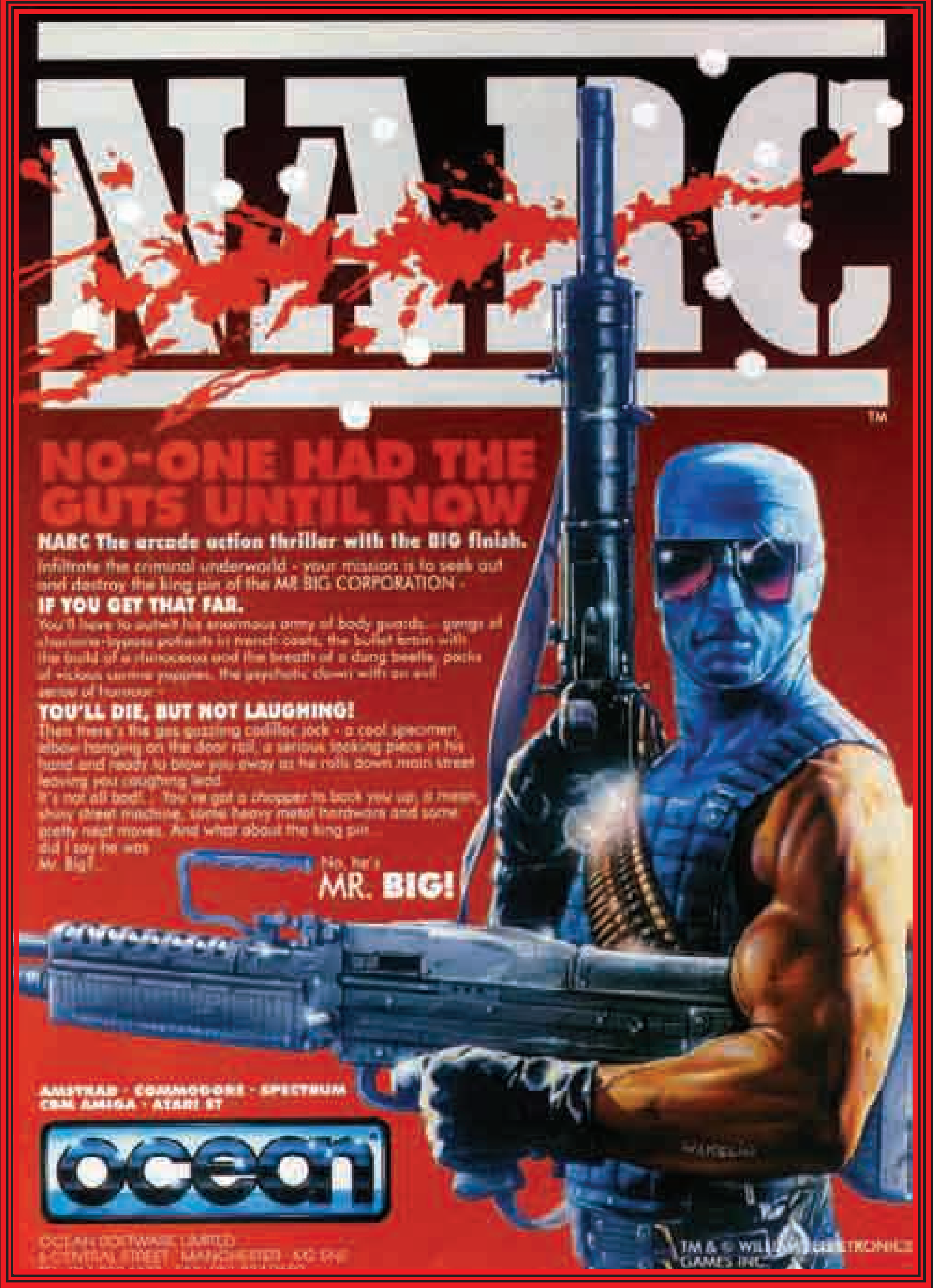


▼ Polar bears came in both tank-tread and non-tank-tread versions. Awesome.

Release: 1998
Format: Nintendo 64
Publisher: TakeTwo Interactive
Developer: DMA Design



▼ The kangaroo boxing matches – best moment.



NARC [Various Formats] Ocean, 1990 – Original UK Advert

THE ULTIMATE COLLECTION



THIS MONTH'S ULTIMATE COLLECTOR IS SIMON (ONLINE NAME: SUPERJOE), A 31 YEAR-OLD MOTORCYCLE SALESMAN FROM HARROGATE, NORTH YORKSHIRE. WHEN HE'S NOT SELLING SUPER BIKES OR SPENDING TIME WITH HIS GIRLFRIEND, HE CAN BE FOUND ONLINE OR TRAWLING EBAY FOR THAT BILLIONTH CONSOLE TO ADD TO HIS COLLECTION…



▼ Simon's girlfriend keeps him topped up with plenty of bevvies.

games™: When did your interest in videogames begin?
Simon: A long time ago. I think I was about ten years old when I got a Spectrum+ bought for me. After that I had a Spectrum+2, Atari ST, and then an Amiga. 1992 saw the end of games for me when I had to sell the Amiga to raise money for my first car.

g™: How long have you been collecting videogames for?
S: The original PlayStation launch in 1995 saw my return to buying games, and the start of the collection I have now. A note to those people who think the Xbox 360 is expensive – I paid £299.99 for my PlayStation 11 years ago!

g™: Where do you buy most of your stuff?
S: For new games and consoles I mainly use Gameplay, and for retro it's always been eBay. I am far too lazy to go round car boot sales, so I have to get into bidding wars with other collectors, but if that is what it takes for me to avoid 5am drives to a muddy field then I'm happy to pay the price.

g™: How many games do you own?
S: Not sure, and I'm not sure I want to count them all. I know I have more games than I could ever play, but it doesn't stop me buying more.

g™: What's your favourite console?
S: At the moment it's the 360 simply because it gets played the most and it has the best online games. Having said that, I really do have a soft spot for my PS2, which still has some amazing games – at the moment I'm into *Guitar Hero*.

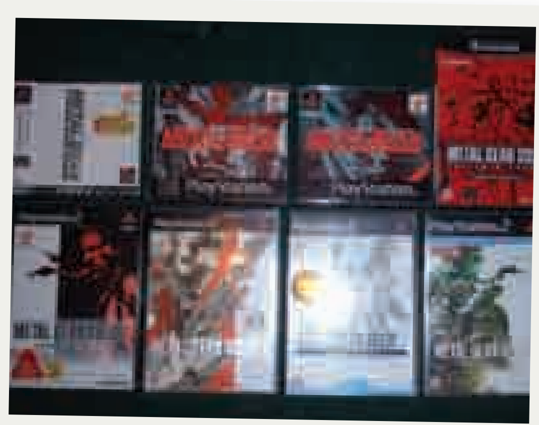
g™: What's your most prized videogame possession and why?
S: I have two favourites: my original release sealed *ICO* and *The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past*. I actually had to buy the re-release of *ICO* so I could play the game, I couldn't possibly open my original copy. I like it because it's quite rare and is/was a fantastic game. I like my *Zelda* because although it isn't sealed it's in excellent



condition and was a game I originally played when released. It's one of the few games I have completed and I keep promising myself to set up the SNES and play it again.

g™: What is your favourite game, ever?
S: Impossible question to answer, but the top three in my 'hours spent on a game' list would be *Pro Evolution Soccer 5*, *SOCOM 2* and *Final Fantasy VII*.

g™: What is your absolute favourite videogame genre and why?
S: I find shooting games my favourite genre. There is just so much satisfaction in winning an online shooting game like *Ghost Recon* or *SOCOM*. Luckily for me I'm pretty good at these games – if I wasn't then I can assure you they definitely wouldn't be my favourite.







Simon's collection reaches up to the sky, his mother must be so proud.

WE ALSO ASKED SIMON WHICH CONSOLES HE OWNED, BUT THE ANSWER WAS SO BIG WE HAD TO MAKE IT A COMPLETELY SEPARATE BOXOUT…

Xbox 360
PSP
PlayStation2
PSOne
Dreamcast
Saturn
Mega Drive
Master System
Master System II
GameCube
Nintendo 64
N64 Pikachu
SNES
NES
Nintendo DS
GBA SP
GBA
Game Boy
Game Boy Light
Game Boy Color
Game Boy Pocket
Bandai Wonderswan
Neo Geo
Neo Geo Pocket Color
Atari Jaguar
Amstrad GX400
Commodore Amiga 600
Commodore 64
Spectrum+2
Spectrum 48k
Binatone TV Master MK6

g™: What about your favourite game series?
S: For overall quality of game, from the sound, graphics and incredibly clever gameplay, it has to be *Metal Gear Solid*. There are so many standout moments in the three modern *MGS*s that make it a truly world-class series of games.

g™: Are there any items missing from your collection that you would like to get hold of?
S: There is so much to choose from as my collection is so diverse. I like too many games and hardware to concentrate on one area. So I don't have any one area that is close to completion. I suppose I would most like to get some more Game Boys as I have a few of them already. Thinking about it, I would like a *Zelda* Edition Game Boy Advance SP.

g™: How much do you think you have spent on your collection?
S: If I knew the answer to that I would be very depressed indeed. eBay has been kind to me over the years, but it has to be thousands of pounds. I think of it this way: there are plenty of people who spend £40 plus a week on smoking – this is just my habit (without the lung cancer).

g™: Do you play on all your consoles?
S: Mainly Xbox 360 and PS2. The older consoles are only played very occasionally. In fact, things like my NES and Master System I dare not take out of the boxes for fear of damaging the packaging. That's one of my problems, if I get something that is in really good condition I can't use it in case I damage it – oh dear.

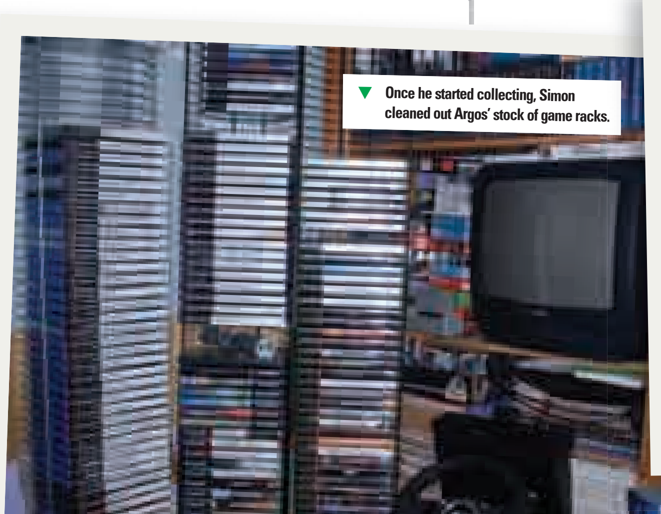
g™: Looking to the PS3 and Nintendo Wii launches, are you going to buy both?
S: Yep, Nintendo Wii because it offers something different and PS3 because it offers some more of the same.

g™: Have you ever discovered a real bargain?
S: A free, boxed Spectrum 48k. I found it when I was clearing out a flat after some lads had vacated in a hurry.

g™: What game are you most looking forward to playing next?
S: I'm hooked on *Oblivion* at the moment (360), and am most looking forward to *Pro Evo 6* on the 360, and *MGS4* on the PS3.

Q. So come on, are you an Xbox, a PlayStation or a Nintendo gamer?
S: All three, although I feel it was PlayStation that got me back into gaming after a layoff. I feel that only PlayStation could be considered cool. Put it this way, I would feel extremely uncomfortable walking down the street in an Xbox or Nintendo t-shirt, but would feel okay in a PlayStation one – or is that me getting old?

A special mention should go to my girlfriend, who puts up with me and my games room and brings me an endless supply of tea/coffee.



Once he started collecting, Simon cleaned out Argos' stock of game racks.



To get the most out of your games, get a big TV!



Share your views about old-school gaming

Retro Contact

First Contact

If you're into retro gaming and there's something you'd like to share with the gaming public, why not write to us at: games™ Retro Contact, Imagine Publishing Ltd, Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EZ. Or email: gamestm@imagine-publishing.co.uk

TOP SPOT SHOCK!

Oi games™!

I just wanted to say that I loved the Top 100 Retro Games and was shocked to see that the amazing *Super Mario Kart* made it to the number one spot. In fact, looking at the top ten, it was heart-warming to see so many great Nintendo titles in there. It really proves that nobody does games quite like The Big N. In fact, the only problem I had with the top ten in general was that a few little factual errors crept in (attributing Link's creation to someone other than Shigeru Miyamoto, for example) other than that, though, it was a brilliant read and well worth waiting for.

Jason Keys

And we thought we'd put this topic to bed. Well, all of you obviously love chewing this one over, so we'll just have to keep indulging your Retro Top 100 interest. To be honest, we were fully expecting *Ocarina Of Time* to walk away with the top spot (and to be fair it very nearly did). Still, it's wonderful to see that Nintendo's excellent racer made number one, and it just goes to show what our readers really think. Mind you, the writer of the following letter probably won't agree with you, Jason…

UNHAPPY PUNTER

Dear games™,

I always knew that you catered to a different retro audience, and now I've been proved correct. Your top ten was laughable, primarily because the mighty *Elite* didn't even feature in it – instead relegated to number 11. I was a tad worried when I saw so many 8-bit classics appearing in the bottom 50, but now I've seen the rest of the chart all I can do is weep for my fellow readers – they obviously wouldn't know a good game if it came and smacked them in the face.

David Ball

We think you're being a teensy bit harsh here, Dave (can we call you Dave?). Everyone has different tastes and preferences when it comes to their favourite games just as with everything else in life, so it's inevitable that not everyone will agree with your point of view. It was a reader's survey, what more can we say?

POOR SERVICE

Dear games™,

What's happened to the Rom-Service article that used to appear in the magazine? It featured oodles of fascinating tips for getting the best out of emulation, and I reckon it's a real shame that **games™** no longer appears to be covering it. In the last year, we've had the PSP and Nintendo DS, and both consoles have some great applications available for them, but, apart from the odd news story, you hardly mention them. An in-depth feature on either system would be greatly welcomed, don't you think?

Keith Moore



games™'ll fix it for you and you and you and… bah bah bah!

Sorry you've missed Rom-Service, Keith, and you're quite right, it definitely needs to be updated. There has been a lot of cool stuff happening lately on the home-brew scene for both machines so we'll try and get some coverage for you very soon.

BEST OF THE BEST

Dear games™,

I love the magazine and read it whenever I get the chance. I'm also a huge fan of retro compilations and would like to know which ones you consider to be the best available – I have a PAL Xbox, PS2 and a PSP. I understand that you've reviewed a few compilations recently, however you don't appear to have the issues they featured in. At the moment I'm looking at *Taito Legends*, *Midway Arcade Treasures 3* and *Tecmo Classic Arcade*.

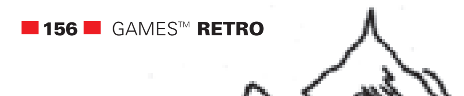
Stephen Butcher

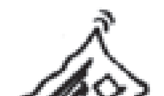
We've covered all the compilations you've mentioned, and the best by a proverbial country mile is *Taito Legends*. There's a fantastic array of hit titles on it including *Bubble Bobble*, *Rastan* and *The New Zealand Story*, plus you can normally pick it up for around a tenner. Compilations to look forward to in the future include the excellent *Taito Legends 2* for Xbox and PS2, and *Capcom Classics Collection Remixed* for the PSP.

GUITAR OOH MAN

Dear games™,

Oh my god! I picked up *Guitar Hero* from Game recently, and I have to say that it's probably the best fun I've ever had on my PS2. In fact, it's probably the best rhythm action game that I've ever played – yes, even better than the amazing




STAR LETTER

WHERE'S THE LOVE?

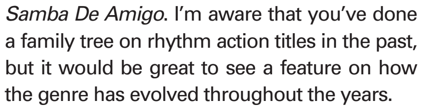
Dear games™,

What the hell is Microsoft doing with its Live Arcade service? As soon as I got my 360, I downloaded *Gauntlet*, *Smash TV*, *Joust* and *Robotron 2084*, and then eagerly awaited the next wave of games. And here I am, a good four months later, still with no new arcade hits to play.

Don't get me wrong, I love *Marble Blast Ultra* and *Feeding Frenzy*, but where the hell are *OutRun*, *Defender* and *Double Dragon*? Many companies have committed to the service, and considering how easy the games must be to convert I'm surprised more haven't appeared. Microsoft had a chance to stuff the Nintendo Wii as the 360 essentially offers the same service. If it carries on like this, I may have to stick with my Xbox compilation packs (assuming they'll be compatible with my 360).

Brett Sherwood

We discuss this regularly here in the office. Microsoft made a big hoo-ha about the number of companies that pledged support for the service, but so far the only developer to make good on its promise is Midway (with another five games on the way). Other than that, support for arcade games is pretty weak. *Street Fighter II* is still in the works, and nothing has been revealed from the likes of Konami or Sega. Let's hope this changes in the future.



Samba De Amigo. I'm aware that you've done a family tree on rhythm action titles in the past, but it would be great to see a feature on how the genre has evolved throughout the years.

Charles Hutchinson

Glad to hear you're enjoying *Guitar Hero*. It really is an amazing game and deserves to sell by the bucketload in this country. As for a rhythm-action feature, you could well be on to something there. Quite a few of the team like to get down to games like *Dance Dance Revolution*, *Guitar Hero* and *Samba De Amigo*, so I'm sure we can sort something out.

OUT OF OBSCURITY

Dear games™,

I wanted to drop you a line to say that I really enjoyed reading through the *Alex Kidd In Miracle World* article that featured in issue 41 of your fantastic magazine. I've always enjoyed playing the games and would love to know more about the gaming franchise as it appears to be quite obscure when compared to the likes of Mario and Sonic. Other obscure franchises I'd like to see covered would include *Shinobi*, *Wonder Boy* and *Mega Man*.

Geoff Jones



With no Quick Saves *Miracle World* was tougher than we ever imagined.

Great idea, Geoff. There are plenty of classic videogame characters and franchises that don't get anywhere near the respect that they fully warrant, so I'm sure we can put something together for you. You just keep enjoying the mag, okay?



On a 40-game compilation, we'll do what we can to cover the best titles.

COMPILATION COMPLAINT

Dear games™,

Great review of *Taito Legends 2* in the latest issue. It truly is a welcome surprise to see a compilation such as this get the score it deserves and not the 40-odd marks that most other magazines have been giving it. Indeed, I truly believe that this is one of the greatest compilations to have ever been released, and it's great to see so many Japan-exclusive games appearing on a mainstream computer game. In fact, if I have one complaint about the review, it's that it didn't feature enough information about the games that are included. There are nearly 40 titles on the compilation, yet you only covered nine of them, very disappointing.

Paul Goldsmith

The only problem with your request is that there are just far too many games on *Taito Legends 2* to give each one full justice (it would end up running over about six pages). You're right about the game not receiving enough respect though. It seems nowadays that if a game's not using the latest in 3D graphics, a lot of gamers simply aren't interested. A shame really, but that's the way it is.







It might be easy to play retro games through emulation, but there's nothing quite like owning the original system – that musty smell of ancient electronics can never really be replicated with a PC. Of course, there's always a price to pay and unscrupulous dealers are out to make a quick buck, but you really don't have to pay through the nose if you look in the right places. Charity shops, car boot sales and eBay are all good places to start, but before you do, use our guide to see how much you should be paying…

3DO

Panasonic 3DO	£40-£60
Goldstar 3DO	£45-£60

ACORN COMPUTERS

BBC Micro	£15-£25
Acorn Electron	£10-£25

AMSTRAD

Amstrad CPC 464	£10-£25
Amstrad CPC 664	£20-£25
Amstrad CPC 6128	£25-£50
Amstrad GX4000	£20-£60



ATARI

Atari VCS 2600	£20-£35
Atari ST	£20+ (depending on model)
Atari Lynx	£15+ (depending on model)
Atari Jaguar	£20

COMMODORE

Commodore Vic20	£10-£30
Commodore 64	£10-£30
Commodore Amiga	£20+ (depending on model)
Commodore CDTV	£20-£50
C64 GS	£30-£50
Commodore CD32	£25-£50



MISC

GCE Vectrex (General Consumer Electronics)	£60-£200
MB Vectrex (Milton Bradley)	£150-£200
JAMMA Compatible cabinets	£100-£350 (depending on model)
Super Gun	£120-£400 (depending on model)

NEC

PC Engine	£55-£70
Turbo Grafx-16	£30-£50
Turbo Duo	£120-£180
PC Engine GT	£70-£150
Super Grafx	£80 (prices can fluctuate)



NINTENDO

Game & Watch	£1-£200 (depending on model)
Nintendo Entertainment System	£15-£20
Game Boy/Game Boy Pocket	£5-£10
Game Boy Color	£10-£15
Super Nintendo	£20-£40
Virtual Boy	£80-£100
Nintendo 64	£10-£25

SEGA

Master System	£10-£30 (depending on model)
Mega Drive	£10-£20
Game Gear	£15-£25
Mega CD	£40-£70 (depending on model)
Sega 32X	£35
Sega Nomad	£70-£140
Saturn	£30+ (depending on model)
Dreamcast	£25+ (depending on model)

SINCLAIR

ZX-81	£40-£70
ZX Spectrum 48K	£20-£50
ZX Spectrum +	£30
ZX Spectrum 128K	£40
ZX Spectrum +2	£35
ZX SPECTRUM +3	£40

SNK

Neo Geo MVS Single Slot (arcade system)	£70+ (depending on model)
Neo Geo AES (home System)	£150+
Neo Geo CD	£100+
Neo Geo CDZ	£80+
Neo Geo Pocket Color	£35

Right then – you've just picked up a second-hand console and are looking for some classics to play on it. The only problem is you're not really too sure what to go for. Hopefully games™ can help… Every month we'll be printing the current prices for a range of games for a particular system. Of course, this is subject to change so don't be surprised if you manage to get one for less or, if you're really unlucky, more. This month we'll be looking at some of the best PAL Saturn games for under a fiver…



Sega Rally Championship

Estimated Price: 0.25p-£2
Publisher: Sega
Developer: In-House

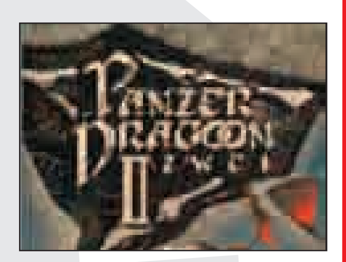
Even today, some ten years after its Saturn release, *Sega Rally Championship* is an incredible racing experience. The physics and car handling are superb, the track design is to die for and the sterling gameplay is second to none. While the visuals are beginning to show their age, there's no denying that this remains essential for your collection. Christ, it's even better than the recently released *Sega Rally 2006*, high praise indeed.



Panzer Dragoon Zwei

Estimated Price: £3-£5
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Team Andromeda

While the expensive *Panzer Dragoon Saga* is easily the best game in the franchise, this 1996 sequel to *Panzer Dragoon* remains the best purchase for those on a budget. For less than the price of a cinema ticket you'll receive a stunning soundtrack, unparalleled boss battles and some of the most impressive Saturn visuals around. As for the gameplay? Well, let's just say we'd rank *Zwei* over the Xbox's astounding *Panzer Dragoon Orta*…



Athlete Kings

Estimated Price: £4-£5
Publisher: Sega
Developer: In-House

As with many of the games in this month's buyers' guide, *Athlete Kings* started off as a popular arcade title (known as *Decathlete* in the US and Japan). Simplicity is the name of the game here, and while the majority of the events are simple yet stamina sapping button mashers, the fantastic animation, perfectly balanced design and wonderfully competitive play elevates *Athlete Kings* into the stratosphere. A superb title.



Virtua Cop

Estimated Price: £1-£3
Publisher: Sega
Developer: In-House

It's looking a little long in the tooth now – and not a patch on its more expensive sequel – but *Virtua Cop* is still a superb little shooter and a great introduction to lightgun shooters on Sega's 32-bit console. The gameplay is as tight as ever, and you'll soon find yourself absorbed by the hectic on-screen action (especially if you to team up with a friend). Be aware, though, the lightgun version is likely to cost you an extra fiver.



Virtua Fighter 2

Estimated Price: £1.50-£3
Publisher: Sega
Developer: In-House

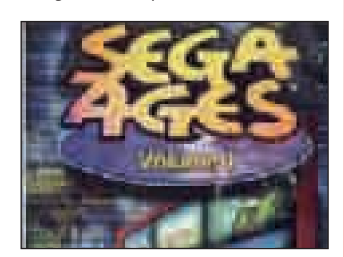
Before the legendary *Virtua Fighter 4* and *Evo* versions appeared, Sega's second foray into its beat-'em-up franchise was generally considered the best available. Even now the game looks fantastic, with glorious visuals, slick animation and some bone-crunching spot effects. But it's the deeper-than-the-ocean gameplay that really makes *Virtua Fighter 2* stand apart from its many peers. This is a compelling experience that few other fighting games can match. Essential.



Sega Ages

Estimated Price: £1-£4
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Working Designs

What we have here is arcade-perfect conversions of three of Sega's greatest games: *Afterburner*, *Space Harrier* and the amazing *OutRun*. Whether you're taking to the skies in *Afterburner*, blasting two-headed dragons in *Space Harrier*, or racing through the gloriously designed levels of *OutRun*, you'll instantly fall in love with these classics all over again. Yes, the games are simple and can be completed in the space of a few hours, but when they're this good it really doesn't matter.



Die Hard Trilogy

Estimated Price: £3-£5
Publisher: Fox Interactive
Developer: Probe Entertainment

Now this is good value for money as you're effectively getting three different games for just a few measly squid. The *Die Hard* section of the game sees you running around the Nakatomi Plaza, offing as many bad guys as possible. The *Die Harder* stage sticks you in a *Virtua Cop*-styled battle through a packed airport, while *Die Hard With A Vengeance* has you racing through the streets of New York. The only downside to this fun collection is that it's so damned tough.



Exhumed

Estimated Price: £1-4
Publisher: BMG Interactive Entertainment
Developer: Lobotomy Software

Forget *Doom*, *Duke Nukem 3D* and even *Quake*, this is the first-person shooter you should invest in if you have access to a Saturn. Set in Egypt, *Exhumed* has everything you could want in an FPS: the controls are tight, the level design is fantastic and there's an array of superb weapons to play with. The graphics may be showing their age now (some enemies blend into the backgrounds) but *Exhumed* is one hell of a classic shooter.





TEST DRIVE II [Various Formats] Accolade, 1989 – Original UK Advert


eMag

ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-

PS2

Manufacturer Sony **UK Launch Date** 24 November 2000
Media 4.75-inch DVD Disc **Current Price** £104.99



The oldest of the next-generation consoles, having had well over a year's head start over both the GameCube and Xbox. Thanks to Sony's reputation, though, it's still the most popular console around – a trend that will no doubt continue now that the remodelled, one-quarter-size PS2 is available in both traditional black and 'special' silver.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE PS2 GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer
Amplitude	Sony	Harmonix
Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	In-House
Devil May Cry 3	Capcom	In-House
Disgaea: Hour Of Darkness	Atlus	Nippon Ichi
Dragon Quest VIII IMPORT	Sony	Level-5
God Of War	Sony	In-House
Gran Turismo 4	Sony	Polyphony Digital
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar	Rockstar North
Guitar Hero IMPORT	Red Octane	Harmonix
Ico	SCEE	In-House
Makai Kingdom	Koei	Nippon Ichi
Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater	Konami	In-House
Prince Of Persia: Sands Of Time	Ubisoft	In-House
Rez	Sega	UGA
Shadow Of The Colossus	Sony	In-House
Soul Calibur III	Sony	Namco
SSX On Tour	Electronic Arts	In-House
Tony Hawk's Underground 2	Activision	Neversoft
Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution	Sega	In-House
We Love Katamari	Namco	In-House

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

God Of War
■ The multi-award winning Sony game garnered massive critical praise, and deservedly so in our book. A must have.



MGS3: Snake Eater
■ Konami's boy, Snake can do no wrong, as the Solid one returned in his greatest outing to this day.



Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution
■ The classic Sega beat-'em-up continues to kick ass – you're in good hands until the anticipated arrival of *Virtua Fighter 5*.

PSP

Manufacturer Sony **UK Launch Date** 1 September 2005
Media UMD Disc **Current Price** £179.99



The PSP is a beautiful piece of hardware and its games portfolio has strengthened enormously in the months following the European release. Its gorgeous design and capability to play UMD movies has made it a huge success outside the traditional gaming market, too. Although it's very expensive for a handheld, its multimedia features justify the price.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE PSP GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer
Ape Academy	Sony	In-House
Burnout Legends	Electronic Arts	Criterion
Exit	Ubisoft	Taito
Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories	Rockstar	In-House
Lumines	Ubisoft	Q Entertainment
Madden NFL 2006	Electronic Arts	In-House
Mega Man Powered Up	Capcom	In-House
Mercury	Sony	Awesome Studios
Metal Gear Ac!d	Konami	In-House
NBA Street Showdown	Electronic Arts	In-House
NFL Street Unleashed	Electronic Arts	In-House
Pro Evolution Soccer 5	Konami	In-House
PQ: Practical Intelligence Quotient	D3	Now Production
Pursuit Force	Sony	In-House
Ridge Racer	Sony	Namco
Tokobot	2K Games	Tecmo
Untold Legends	Activision	SOE
Virtua Tennis: World Tour	Sega	Sumo Digital
WipEout Pure	Sony	In-House
WWE Smackdown! vs RAW 2006	THQ	Yuke's

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

Ape Academy
■ Bite-sized *Ape Escape* with the mad-cap monkeys as they fool around in over 45 fun-fuelled mini-games.



Metal Gear Ac!d
■ The handheld strategy game based on the successful *Metal Gear Solid* series which utilises a card-based control system.



Virtua Tennis: World Tour
■ The impressive *Virtua* brand takes to courts around the world with playable characters such as Roger Federer and Venus Williams.








EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE

XBOX

Manufacturer Microsoft **UK Launch Date** 13 March 2002
Media 4.75-inch DVD Disc **Current Price** £99.99



Despite a slow start, the Xbox has swiftly become one of the major players in today's console market. Suggestions that the machine is 'only a PC in a box' are founded, although the Xbox is far more accessible to gamers than most PCs. Despite the recent release of the Xbox 360, Microsoft will be supporting the console until at least 2007.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE XBOX GAMES

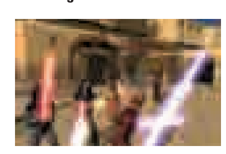
Title	Publisher	Developer
Battlefield 2: Modern Combat	Electronic Arts	DICE
Burnout Revenge	Electronic Arts	Criterion Studios
Chronicles Of Riddick: Butcher Bay	Vivendi Universal	Starbreeze Studios
Fable	Microsoft	Big Blue Box
Fahrenheit	Atari	Quantic Dream
Forza Motorsport	Microsoft	In-House
Halo 2	Microsoft	Bungie
Jet Set Radio Future	Sega	Smilebit
Ninja Gaiden Black	Microsoft	Tecmo
Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath	Electronic Arts	Oddworld Inhabitants
OutRun 2	Sega	Sumo Digital
Pro Evolution Soccer 5	Konami	In-House
Project Zero	Microsoft	Tecmo
Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy	Midway	In-House
Psychonauts	Majesco	Double Fine
Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow	Ubisoft	In-House
Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	Ubisoft	In-House
Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic	Activision	BioWare
Street Fighter Anniversary Collection	Capcom	In-House
TimeSplitters: Future Perfect	Electronic Arts	Free Radical

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

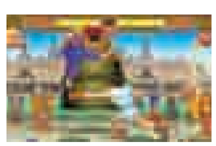
Pro Evolution Soccer 5
What more can be said about the greatest ever football (playing) brand in the world? Apparently, four more lines.



Knights Of The Old Republic
Another award-winner, with *Knights Of The Old Republic* the *Star Wars* universe arguably saw the best game in its franchise.



SF: Anniversary Collection
***Street Fighter*, that classic two-dimensional beat-'em-up, continues to dominate consoles. You have to welcome this into your collection.**



XBOX 360

Manufacturer Microsoft **UK Launch Date** 2 December 2005
Media 4.5-inch Optical Disc **Current Price** £279.99



The Xbox 360 hasn't been around for long, but has already made a huge impact on the industry and become the fastest-selling console in UK history, despite that enormous price tag. Although we can't help feeling that the best is still to come, the Xbox 360's myriad Live functions and decent selection of first-wave titles make it worth sampling right now.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE XBOX 360 GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer
Amped 3	2K Sports	In-House
Battlefield 2: Modern Combat	Electronic Arts	Digital Illusions
Blazing Angels: Squadrons Of WWII	Ubisoft	In-House
Burnout Revenge	Electronic Arts	Criterion
Call Of Duty 2	Activision	Infinity Ward
Condemned: Criminal Origins	Sega	Monolith
Dead Or Alive 4	Microsoft	Tecmo
FIFA 2006	Electronic Arts	In-House
Fight Night Round 3	Electronic Arts	In-House
Geometry Wars 2	Live Arcade	Bizarre Creations
Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter	Ubisoft	In-House
Kameo: Elements Of Power	Microsoft	Rare
Lara Croft Tomb Raider: Legend	Eidos	Crystal Dynamics
Marble Blast Ultra	Live Arcade	Garage Games Inc
NBA 2K6	2K Sports	In-House
Peter Jackson's King Kong	Ubisoft	In-House
Project Gotham Racing 3	Microsoft	Bizarre Creations
Quake 4	Activision	id Software
Ridge Racer 6	Electronic Arts	Namco
The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion	2K Games	Bethesda

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

Battlefield 2: Modern Combat
Forget the dull single-player game, the 24-player Xbox Live online battles are where this series is at its most thrilling.



Ridge Racer 6
Arcade racing at its most loving with the visual flair and ingredients to ensure that this goes down as a 360 classic.



The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion
We only covered this last issue in this section, but we're so impressed that we want to tell you once again that you should own it.



PS2 | PSP | XBOX | XBOX 360 | GAMECUBE | DS | GBA | PC

ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-

GAMECUBE

Manufacturer Nintendo **UK Launch Date** 3 May 2002
Media 3-inch Optical Disc **Current Price** £79.99



Though the GameCube seems destined to struggle up against the other consoles, Nintendo's box of delights is still worth taking a look at. While third-party support is dwindling, it's the first-party releases that really offer some quality gaming. Nintendo still makes some of the finest games ever, so missing out isn't really an option if you love videogames.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAMECUBE GAMES

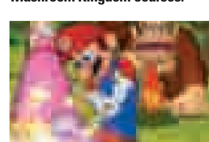
Title	Publisher	Developer
Animal Crossing	Nintendo	In-House
Alien Hominid	03 Entertainment	The Behemoth
Chibi-Robo	Nintendo	Skip
Eternal Darkness	Nintendo	Silicon Knights
F-Zero GX	Nintendo	Amusement Vision
Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life	Ubisoft	Natsume
Ikaruga	Treasure	In-House
killer7	Capcom	In-House
Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour	Nintendo	Camelot
Mario Kart: Double Dash!!	Nintendo	In-House
Metroid Prime 2: Echoes	Nintendo	In-House
Paper Mario: The Thousand Year Door	Nintendo	Intelligent Systems
Pikmin 2	Nintendo	In-House
Resident Evil 4	Capcom	In-House
Soul Calibur II	Namco	In-House
Super Mario Sunshine	Nintendo	In-House
Super Monkey Ball 2	Sega	Amusement Vision
Tales Of Symphonia	Namco	In-House
Viewtiful Joe 2	Capcom	In-House
Zelda: The Wind Waker	Nintendo	In-House

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

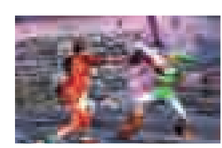
Animal Crossing
■ **Described as an innovative gaming masterpiece, this wonderful game entranced both east and west with its charms.**



Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour
■ **It's golf, but Mario style! Join Mario, Peach, Donkey Kong and all all their friends on the Mushroom Kingdom courses.**



Soul Calibur II
■ **One of the greatest 3D weapons-based fighting games featuring *Zelda's* Link as a fully playable and bad-ass fighter.**



DS

Manufacturer Nintendo **UK Launch Date** 11 March 2005
Media Flash Cartridge **Current Price** £89.99



Chances are, you'll either already be completely in love with Nintendo's newest handheld or you'll have hated it from the start. The DS has dismissed misconceptions about it being nothing more than a gimmick by giving us a number of excellent games over the past year, and its affordability and accessibility have given it a sizeable advantage over the PSP.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE DS GAMES

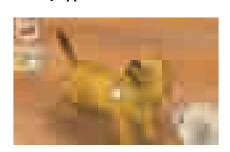
Title	Publisher	Developer
Advance Wars: Dual Strike	Nintendo	Intelligent Systems
Animal Crossing: Wild World	Nintendo	In-House
Another Code	Nintendo	Jinx
Daigasso! Band Brothers	Nintendo	In-House
Kirby: Power Paintbrush	Nintendo	HAL Labs
Lost In Blue	Konami	In-House
Mario And Luigi: Partners In Time	Nintendo	In-House
Mario Kart DS	Nintendo	In-House
Meteos	Nintendo	Q Entertainment
Metroid Prime Pinball	Nintendo	Fuse Games
Nintendogs	Nintendo	In-House
Ossu! Tatakae! Ouendan!	Nintendo	Inis
Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney	Nintendo	Capcom
Sonic Rush	Sega	In-House
Tony Hawk's American Sk8land	Activision	Vicarious Visions
Trauma Center: Under The Knife	Atlus	Atlus
Viewtiful Joe: Double Trouble	Capcom	Clover
Wario Ware Touch	Nintendo	In-House
Yoshi Touch And Go	Nintendo	In-House
Zoo Keeper	Ignition Entertainment	Success

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

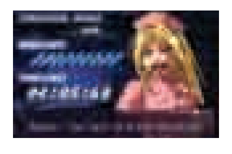
Partners In Time
■ **It's Mario and Luigi's second outing as they endeavour to rescue Princess Peach from the evil Shroobs.**



Nintendogs
■ **Over 2 million copies sold across Europe – can Miyamoto do no wrong? The answer would clearly appear to be no.**



Trauma Center: Under The Knife
■ **Always wanted to be a real-life surgeon but couldn't make the cut? Then this DS classic-to-be will make you the next *ER* superstar.**











EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE

GBA

Manufacturer Nintendo **UK Launch Date** 22 June 2001
Media Flash Cartridge **Current Price** £69.99



Ideal for gaming on the move, the GBA is a cheap and effective way of getting games to those who don't have time to sit down and play. The leaps in handheld technology mean that GBA games can be compared favourably to their console-based cousins. The lovely SP model is available in a variety of colours, while the even more diminutive Micro is also out to buy now.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE GBA GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer
Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising	Nintendo	In-House
Astro Boy: Omega Factor	Sega	Treasure
Boktai: The Sun Is In Your Hand	Konami	In-House
Castlevania: Aria Of Sorrow	Konami	In-House
Final Fantasy Tactics Advance	Nintendo	Square Enix
Fire Emblem: The Sacred Stones	Nintendo	In-House
Golden Sun: The Lost Age	Nintendo	Camelot
Harvest Moon: Friends Of Mineral Town	Ubisoft	Natsume
Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past/Four Swords	Nintendo	In-House
Legend Of Zelda: The Minish Cap	Nintendo	Capcom
Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga	Nintendo	AlphaDream
Mario Golf: Advance Tour	Nintendo	Camelot
Mario Vs Donkey Kong	Nintendo	In-House
Metroid: Zero Mission	Nintendo	In-House
Pokémon Pinball: Ruby And Sapphire	Nintendo	In-House
Pokémon Emerald	Nintendo	In-House
Shining Force: Resurrection Of The Dark Dragon	THQ	Sega
Street Fighter Alpha 3 Upper	Ubisoft	Crawfish
Super Mario Advance 3: Yoshi's Island	Nintendo	In-House
WarioWare: Twisted!	Nintendo	In-House

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

AW2: Black Hole Rising
Shape and control wars in the palm of your hand in *Advance Wars 2*, the return of the handheld strategy classic.



A Link To The Past/Four Swords
This *Zelda* title packs in two-for-one. *Link To The Past* provides the single-player fun and *Four Swords* the multi-player thrills.



Metroid: Zero Mission
Samus returned to explore the planet Zebes in order to defeat the evil Mother Brain and the notorious space pirates. Classic.



PC

Manufacturer N/A **UK Launch Date** N/A
Media 4.75-inch CD/DVD Disc **Current Price** £variable



While primarily bought as a work platform, the PC has swiftly become the haven of the more 'mature' gamer. With its natural ability for online and LAN play, it's perfectly tailored for the FPS, strategy and MMORPG genres. However, it can cost a fortune to keep a PC up to date and running fast enough to support flashy graphics and other special effects.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE PC GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer
Battlefield 2	Electronic Arts	Digital Illusions
City Of Heroes	NCsoft	Cryptic Studios
Far Cry	Ubisoft	Crytek
Football Manager 2006	Sega	Sports Interactive
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North
Grim Fandango	LucasArts	In-House
GTR – FIA GT Racing Game	Atari	SimBin Development
Guild Wars	NCSoft	ArenaNet
Half-Life 2	Vivendi	Valve Software
Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising	NovaLogic	In-House
The Movies	Activision	Lionhead Studios
Pro Evolution Soccer 4	Konami	In-House
Rise Of Nations	Microsoft	Big Huge Games
Rome: Total War	Activision	Creative Assembly
Sam & Max Hit The Road	Activision	LucasArts
Sensible World Of Soccer	Sensible Software	Renegade
Sid Meier's Pirates!	Atari	Firaxis Games
The Sims 2	Electronic Arts	Maxis
Unreal Tournament 2004: Editor's Choice Edition	Atari	Digital Extremes
World Of Warcraft	Vivendi	Blizzard

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

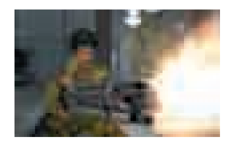
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas
The console classic returns to its PC-system roots in the simply awesome and must-have latest game in the *GTA* series.



Rome: Total War
Transported to the battlefields of old, battles will see up to 10,000 fully polygonal, highly detailed warriors kicking off.



Unreal Tournament 2004: Editor's Choice Edition
That superb FPS can only get better with this expanded version of the outstanding classic.



CONTACT

ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF games™

Enough of what we think – now you get to show off your rapier wit to praise, criticise or mock the games industry. Or not…

WHAT IS UP with the PSP? While some gamers are disparaged by the quality and quantity of the software that is currently available, my main concerns for the system go deeper than this in that the PSP is, quite literally, a real pain to use.

After just a 30-minute gaming session I find myself in considerable discomfort around the fingers and shoulders area. Any longer than this and I really begin to ache. It makes me wonder whether Sony has overlooked something that is inherently wrong with the ergonomics of the system. I have been playing games, both with joypads and handhelds, for donkey's years, and apart from the occasional blister none of them have ever tried to actually physically cripple me!

I recently bought *Street Fighter Alpha 3 Max*, thinking that a 2D fighter couldn't possibly aggravate my aching joints. Alas, having spent the last two days trying to pull off a variety of special moves on the PSP's four-directional pad, I am now looking for the number of a good masseur.

Kevin Thorpe

games™: Well, Kevin, for all its good points, the design of the PSP has been unanimously denounced by almost everyone here. Yes, it's black and shiny, but the button layout seems to have advanced our impending arthritis by 20 years. We find that any game that requires even the smallest degree of precision – and we're thinking of tackling in *Pro Evo* here – virtually requires that you injure yourself to get it right. However, word on the Japanese street is that a peripheral is on the way that clips over the four-direction pad and allows easier control (see Essentials: Peripherals last issue). It seems that even Sony has recognised this design oversight. Serves them right for rushing it.

GREAT MAGAZINE AND all, but I remain quite distressed whenever I view your new PSP and Xbox 360 must-haves. All appears to be well with the DS list, but the PSP one has many titles that probably don't deserve to be there, and the Xbox 360 list is baffling. *FIFA '06* doesn't merit a place in anyone's collection, especially not the dire 360 version, so its inclusion is confusing. Also, mediocre games like *Gun*, *King Kong*, *Perfect Dark Zero*, *Blazing Angels* (which you actually gave a 6/10 in the same issue), and also what are most likely not-360-quality conversions such as *Quake 4* and *Burnout Revenge*.

Under PSP must-haves you include confusing games like *Madden '06* and *Smackdown '06* – which are probably much better on PlayStation2 – as well as such mediocrity as *Untold Legends*. You could correct this easily by including previous, seemingly forgotten greats like *Puzzle Bobble Pocket*, *GripShift*, *Me & My Katamari* and *Everybody's Golf*. Future releases such as *Worms*, *LocoRoco* and *Monster Hunter* should get places and make it a much higher quality list with titles that people should *definitely* have in their collection.

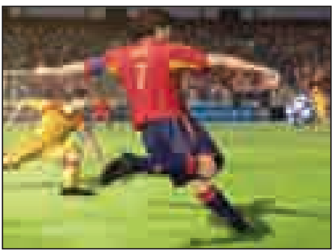
Jonathan Donnelly

games™: Point taken on the PSP front, Jonathan, *Everybody's Golf* and *Me & My Katamari* would be welcome additions to any

"HAVING SPENT **THE LAST TWO DAYS** TRYING TO **PULL OFF** A VARIETY OF **SPECIAL MOVES** ON **THE PSP'S FOUR-DIRECTIONAL PAD**, I AM NOW **ON THE LOOK OUT** FOR THE NUMBER OF **A GOOD MASSEUR**"



It sure looks sexy, but those damned fiddly controls can be just too much sometimes.



Mediocre football sim in 'must-have' list shock! What were we thinking?

Making Contact

There are many wonderful ways to get in touch with games™. The traditional postal method is perfectly acceptable using the address below:

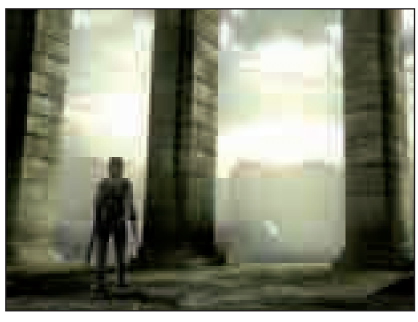
games™, Imagine Publishing Ltd, Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, BH2 6EZ

However, there are quicker ways to reach us thanks to the technological marvel that is the Internet. Email us at this address:
gamestm@imagine-publishing.co.uk





Watch yourself there! Just looking at this control pad can turn you into a murderer.



Can you ever have too much story? *Shadow Of The Colossus* certainly suggests so.

collection, but on the 360 we simply have to make our case. One of the major gripes everyone – perhaps yourself included – had with the 360 was the underwhelming quality of the launch titles. Yes, there have been a few quality releases in the months since – all of which are on the list – but there simply aren't 20 truly great games to include.

Unfortunately every format, no matter how young, has to have 20 entries on its list, and what is there is simply the best of what's around. We assume that our readers – whom we credit with intelligence and the ability to reason – will take into account the relative infancy of the format, and we hope they will make purchases based on the full review, not as an afterthought in the back of the magazine. It is a trait of gamers to scrutinise every tiny detail, looking for a weakness, but the fact that you didn't suggest alternatives for the 360, as you did so well for the PSP, suggests that the criticism was a little hollow and, perhaps, for its own sake. The list (and the format) will grow and improve over time; until then, try and relax a bit. Surely you have more important things to think about.

OH MY GOD! I was just reading issue 42 of **games™** when I was amused by the ridiculous comment Jack Thompson made about the PS2 Dualshock controller! Such an outrageous comment, I thought, that even my girlfriend, who isn't exactly pro games, agreed with the hilarity of such nonsense. When I say, 'not pro games' I need to point out two facts. First, she is the highest scoring person on the original *Tetris* I have ever met, clearing 180 lines. Secondly, the one game that she showed interest in watching me play was *Manhunt*. *MANHUNT*! (I barely played the game because it was so poor.) Anyway, I shared my amusement with her, and the response I got on quoting Thompson? "Well, he's right isn't he?" I say again, oh my god!
Graham Mansell

games™: Sorry, Graham, but your letter makes very little sense. At first you seem to be saying that Jack Thompson's comments were so ridiculous that even your girlfriend, who is no fan of games, agrees that what he said was bollocks. Then you say that she's good at *Tetris*, which suggests she's not entirely anti-games. Then you deride her for being interested in *Manhunt*, which, once again, gives the impression that she isn't pro games. As if that weren't enough, you round off your letter by saying that she said, "Well, [Thompson] is right isn't he", despite starting your letter saying that she disagreed with him. The subject of your letter is either: that your girlfriend is good at games; that your girlfriend is bad at games; that she agrees with Thompson; that she doesn't agree with

CONTACT

ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF games™

Enough of what we think, this is where you lot get to show off your rapier wit to praise, criticise or mock the games industry. Or not…

Text Life

☐ Nice Cover.
g™: Why thank you, and we were beginning to think no one cared.

☐ Jack Thompson sucks ass.
g™: We may not agree with his views, but what he does behind closed doors is his business.

☐ *Halo* the movie – Yeeessss!
g™: Yeah, well, *Resident Evil, Super Mario Bros, Mortal Kombat, Street Fighter, Alone In The Dark*. Noooooooo!

☐ I miss Gizmondo.
g™: You are a sick, sick man. Seriously, seek help.

☐ PS3 in November. Finally.
g™: Well, until the next delay anyway… not wanting to be pessimistic or anything.

☐ *LocoRoco* looks ace.
g™: We'd have to agree there. Who needs Xbox 360? Big yellow blobs are the future!

☐ I demand to have *Guitar Hero*!
g™: Yes. We heartily agree. Our fingers have healed, and it's time for them to bleed again!

☐ Three large pepperoni to take away please.
g™: Er, we think you have the wrong number.

☐ Can I have your gamertag?
g™: One last time, piss off!

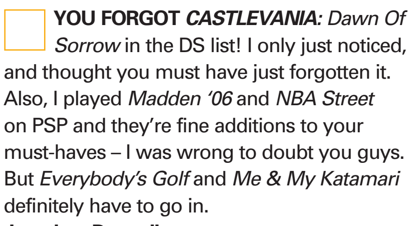


■ Will games like *PGR3* create the cult of online gaming celebrity?



■ *The Mushroom Kingdom* – great design, but in no way is it British.

Thompson; or all of them at once. Now, we're old hands at this letter nonsense, and we're fairly sure that good letters don't leave you feeling confused and a teensy bit unhappy. Yours did.



☐ **YOU FORGOT *CASTLEVANIA: Dawn Of Sorrow*** in the DS list! I only just noticed, and thought you must have just forgotten it. Also, I played *Madden '06* and *NBA Street* on PSP and they're fine additions to your must-haves – I was wrong to doubt you guys. But *Everybody's Golf* and *Me & My Katamari* definitely have to go in.
Jonathan Donnelly

games™: You again! Listen, we're glad you let us off the hook on the PSP thing, but was it really worth your while pointing out that we missed *Castlevania: Dawn Of Sorrow* off the DS must-haves. Do you have all these consoles? Why do you even care? Go outside, breathe the air – life doesn't stop and start on page 164 of **games™**. Or does it?

☐ **HAS ANYONE NOTICED** the increasing amount of videogame competitions that are being broadcast live on the Internet via Gamespot? Videogames being broadcast, like watching the football on television? It's quite a curious idea, and seems to be the natural progression. This has technically always been possible without the likes of Gamespot. You could always dip in and out of a game of *Quake III* as a viewer and pretend you were watching an episode of some futuristic blood sports programme.

With Gamespot sponsoring these competitions, and offering cash prizes, it's likely that the better players will become noticeable among viewers, as they will be able to choose which battles they want to see, and keep tabs on their favourite players. This means that videogame players could become stars in their own right. The major flaw to this idea is that there is such a wide-ranging amount of games being played over the net, and players often use different nicknames for different games. On the Xbox 360, however, you play all your games under a single pseudonym, and with league tables already established for games like *Project Gotham Racing 3* it is probably only a matter of time before we start seeing the first celebrities of the virtual world. The Machinima scene is already generating films using modded game engines – fictional films are being created in a virtual world. The Machinima way of making films allows directors complete control over their actors, making them like Hitchcock always claimed them to be: cattle. So using the technology that is already being harnessed





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FROM THE FORUM

WHEN IS A GAME TOO SHORT?

by hobbyists, surely it would be possible to mount a large-scale virtual television show similar to Grandstand.
Tom

games™: Wow. What an interesting and long letter, Tom. The broadcasting of online games does raise questions of celebrity, but it's basically already in place. There have been professional gamers for years – bloody good gamers who are sponsored and flown around the world to play in competitions – mostly in the PC and FPS market. Broadcasting across the Internet certainly raises the possibility of the appeal becoming less selective, though it's unlikely that it would ever take off in quite the way you are imagining. We all love games here, but not all of us would want to sit and watch somebody else playing, even if they are shit-hot. For most, the joy of games is the taking part, the interactivity, and it's likely that broadcasts will remain the preserve of the truly hardcore gamer. That's not to say there won't be celebrities; there will, and they won't require corporate sponsorship or big competitions to attain that status any more either – that's the democratising power of the Internet. The real, and most important question is will more people actually know about these gaming celebrities, or will it simply stay the same?

AS DAN POWELL'S letter highlighted in issue 42, *Tomb Raider* and *GTA* were among the final 25 contenders for the Great British Design Award. You were right to suggest that these lists are often 'riddled with fads and trends', but as for the videogames-as-art idea, these two examples are hardly artistically innovative are they? In terms of gameplay, yes, but Lara Croft is a 'pretty videogame character' while *GTA* is a slightly comic book-style representation of urban life (albeit in fictional cities). So the art here comes from a sense of realism – hardly giving videogames the credit they deserve. It is a step forward that they have been nominated, but had it been the *Mushroom Kingdom* instead of *San Andreas* on the short list, then this would have shown more of an acceptance of videogames as art.
Craig Williams

games™: We couldn't agree more, Craig. These games do represent great achievement in design, but one can't help feeling that had Lara Croft actually been called Larry Croft – minus the large breasts, small ass and hot pants – then *Tomb Raider* may not have had such impact in the first place. Any kind of large-scale recognition gets hardcore gamers all in a tizzy about the artistic merit of the medium, so we're not really all that surprised it happened here. It does seem strange that both *Tomb Raider* and *Grand Theft Auto* first gained notoriety outside of the gaming public for reasons entirely different from the quality of their design, but the more fundamental concern is that the *Mushroom Kingdom* is from *Mario*, a JAPANESE piece of design, and wasn't ever very likely to make the *Great British* Design Award list. We know gamers spend a lot of time indoors, but may we suggest you start attending your geography classes.

"BROADCASTING VIDEOGAMES LIKE FOOTBALL MATCHES SEEMS A NATURAL PROGRESSION. YOU COULD DIP INTO A GAME OF QUAKE III AS A VIEWER AND PRETEND YOU'RE WATCHING SOME FUTURISTIC BLOOD SPORTS PROGRAMME"

AC-AA-1806
People moan about games being only ten hours long (*Shadow Of The Colossus* anyone), but often they fail to remember that games didn't used to have this much content, and sometimes only took a few hours to complete. Indeed, some PSOne games are considered too short, such as *Metal Gear Solid* which is beatable in two and a half hours if you skip the cut-scenes – even if you don't it's easily done in less than half a day! And yet this game is considered a classic and appears in the **games™** Retro Top 100. So why, when a game is anything under 15 hours do we deem it too short? Surely it should only last as long as it takes to tell the story? Enough of my waffling, though, when do you think a game is too short?

tweeter
Depends on the story, mate. I'd rather play an involving short game than a vacuous long one. I'm probably going to get shot down in flames for this, but most RPGs are 70+ hours. Far too long, and the story does tend to drag. Most adventure games – *Resident Evil*, *Tomb Raider*, *Silent Hill* – take, on average, under ten hours to complete, sometimes much less, but the story is tighter and more confined. Besides, more mature gamers have families, careers, social lives... we can't dedicate hours upon hours to games.

Neeman
I beat *Ico* in around five hours, but the story felt so complete that it didn't matter. *Trace Memory* on the DS, however, was a four-hour job, and I felt a little short-changed. Personally, I like a game to be 'fleshed out', but there are examples that could've done with being a lot shorter. There's nothing worse than having to slog through a game without enjoying it. There are so many FPS games that do this and, honestly, it gets annoying.

JD
It's less about length and more about pacing. For example, some games can feel an absolute trudge when they hit the ten-hour mark, whereas something like *Oblivion* doesn't even get going until ten hours. As long as the developers can keep it interesting and fulfilling, I'm not bothered how long my games are.

Shin
It depends on the game and its replay value. I like my RPGs to be as long as possible, as I'm less inclined to replay after completion. On the other hand, I thought games like *Shadow Of The Colossus* and the *MGS* series were the perfect length to encourage repeated visits – I can't even begin to count how often I cleared those. It was the same back in the day when games were generally shorter. You didn't mind clearing *Super Mario Bros* or *Gradius* quickly, because you just restarted and tried to improve your record.